

The Analysis of Why Women Kill Season 2 Based on the Development of Feminism in China

Zhen Guo^{1,*}

¹North China Electric Power University, English Department, Baoding, Hebei, China

Abstract. The second season of Why Women Kill has been widely disseminated and discussed in China. By combining an in-depth viewing of Why Women Kill II and the current development of Chinese feminism, this paper adopts the textual close reading to analyze the connotation of beauty, the awakening of female self-awareness, and the abnormal development of Chinese feminism. The work hopes to promote the further development of Chinese feminism, raise the level of gender consciousness in the whole society and accumulate experience and provide reference for similar feminist drama series and related researches in China and abroad.

1 INTRODUCTION

Tracing the development of Chinese feminism with the change in economic and social systems and the continuous communication between Chinese and Western cultures, Chinese women have gradually improved their social status from absolute obedience to the patriarchy to self-awakening and daring to fight for their rights. However, women are still in a disadvantaged position, bearing family and social pressures and facing unceasing social problems concerning the violation of women's rights. Chinese feminism in the new era is facing great challenges.

Nearly 150,000 people rated Why Women Kill II on Douban and over two million people searched for it on Baidu, causing widespread discussion on the Internet. Why Women Kill II explores the meaning of beauty, what lies beneath the surface and what a woman is willing to do to find her destination. Compared with the first season of Why Women Kill, the second season has a more innovative design and deepens the reflection on feminism, hitting the pain of most viewers in China.

2 CLOSE READING AND RESEARCH OF THE TEXT

2.1. Interpretation of Beauty

Women on TV are often young, beautiful and slim as if old, plain or fat women are frumpy. But the three main female characters in Why Women Kill II are far from attractive. Rita Castillo is aging; Dee Fillcot is obese; the heroine Alma Fillcot is neither young nor beautiful. If beauty is power, in the battle of it, those who have

beauty become the strong ones and those who don't have are naturally reduced to the disadvantaged.

However, who defines the standard of beauty? Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex*: "In a dressed woman, though nature present, it's captured and reshaped by the desires of men"[1] Beauty is what men want to see. That is why from commercials to films there are few women with mediocre bodies and common faces. The nature of male-oriented visual culture is to place men and women in a "see/be seen" mode. [2] Thus, females' beauty is defined and judged by males. Women in a patriarchal society are unable to reject this "male gaze" and therefore acquiesce to the standards of beauty they set.

Moreover, men view women as objects and deny women's self-actualization through the objectification of women, as if women's self-confidence comes from the male gaze.[3] By placing too much emphasis on the external and measuring women against indicators as objects, men ignore the spiritual interior of women as "human beings", as if the only value of women is in their external appearance not in their role as men who can think and contribute to the world through the power of their minds.

The patriarchal definition of beauty and the objectification of women lead to women's inexorable desire to be complimented on their appearance by men. Alma, decades after being irresponsibly hurt by her high school hunk, is overjoyed by his compliment on her appearance. While Catherine Castillo is suspicious of Scooter's (Dee's boyfriend, Rita's lover) "raging love", only because of the man's nonsense words of love, she puts aside the doubts, and gladly accepts the "unsolicited love". As the moth to the flame, knowing that the outcome is doomed, women still determine to shape themselves into the way men want to see them.

* Corresponding author: GZCH20020118@163.com

The male-oriented visual culture model subtly internalizes its own value judgments and aesthetic interests into the way women evaluate themselves, i.e., men see, women are seen, and women see themselves seen by men. In this way, the beauty that meets the standard of men's appreciation becomes the standard of women's beauty in society and constantly transforms women's aesthetics and their perception of themselves. [1] The yardstick set and compared by the opposite sex, rather than women who no doubt know women better, creates a gargantuan and unrelenting anxiety, low self-esteem and psychological burden for women, especially those who do not meet the so-called "beauty standard". Women unconsciously compare themselves to it, believing that if they do not meet it, they are defective, and then women began to constantly self-doubt and denial.

Ultimately, women are misled by the patriarchal "beauty standards" and use them to judge and hurt each other. " Even though Rita knows it is offensive to call a girl "fat" and has also been frustrated after being called "old" by her husband, she insists on using "aesthetic standards" as a sharp sword to stab Dee and Catherine, who were also women. Women do not unite against men as blacks do against whites and the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. Instead, they are working with men and hurting other women.

Today, white, young and thin images are all the rage. From social media to clothing shops, women are constantly being taught that you can only be considered beautiful if you are as white as snow, thin as a bone and look younger than your age. Thus, appearance anxiety has been planted in every woman's heart. Bloggers who are 170 and weigh 110 describe themselves as overweight. More and more people pursue the square shoulder or Scapula Gyrus Syndrome in medical term, which causes breathing difficulties, get extremely long nails regardless of the damage to nails and even health, let alone the restrictions on life, and claim to make peace with the makeup-free while the first thing to do after taking a selfie is to open Photo Apps and beautify according to the standard. While more and more people on the Internet are dieting to obtain the "A4 waist", "glasses waist" appears..... Customs and fashions are often dedicated to isolating a woman's body from her transcendence[3], in order to achieve the "beauty" recognized by the patriarchal society, women hurt their bodies cruelly, which is similar to the "foot-binding" in the Qing Dynasty and the girdling in the Middle Ages, which were abandoned by history. The corrupt customs we think we have got rid of just change different forms. Defining women by their appearance alone anytime is superficial, ridiculous, and sensational.

"Undefined girls" is an Internet buzzword, an outlet for women's appearance anxiety. However, contrary to the original intention, many companies have found new commercial opportunities. Whoever hires a plump girl without make-up first to endorse is likely to see a year-on-year increase in revenue. The true meaning of "undefined" is regardless of height and weight, beauty and ugly, and not only girls but also women should not be defined by the external. There is no absolute standard

of beauty. Each woman has her own shining point, and is worth loving and being loved. Inner beauty is taught from childhood, but nowadays, external appearance, rather than talent, has become the most important criterion for judging women revealing the holes in current aesthetic education, which teach people to understand, appreciate and create beauty. On the other hand, this in no way means that beauty is the most important and the only. Society should not be biased and overemphasize superficial beauty. Cultivating women's confidence, independence, bravery and perseverance is equally important and worthy of recognition.

2.2. The Awakening of Female Self-awareness

The underlying reasons and path behind Alma's progression from inconsequential housewife to infamous club president with bloodstained hands are worth pondering. The constant negative reviews since the airing of *Why Women Kill II* may be based on a stereotypical logic about women: if a woman commits a crime, she must be forced to do so; if a woman kills someone, it is highly likely that the person killed was her long-time abusive husband. Most women portrayed in literature have been soft and weak for generations, even in the first season of *Why Women Kill*. But who says that women must be the victims, not the perpetrators? Alma is a female serial killer, symbolizing a declaration of women's autonomy to control their own destinies and the awakening of female consciousness. Kill is the biggest thrill of *Why Women Kill*. Women kill for themselves rather than for men, which is a transformation and rebirth from the consciousness level, showing the progressive consciousness of women who pursue self-liberation and realize their inner desires. The virtual realization of the protagonist's control over her destiny, reversal and outburst of desire inspires the real viewers and increases their satisfaction. Viewers take on the role to make up for the regret and dissatisfaction of real life and complete the ideal. [4] Feminist theory has a basic premise: women are in an oppressed and discriminated class worldwide, not only because they belong to a certain stratum, but also because of being a woman.[5] It is the desire of almost every woman to escape the oppressed and submissive status and become the real director of her own life.

The status of Chinese women is steadily rising, the proportion of women with higher education has surpassed that of men, and women have the right to participate in almost every field. However, compared to men, ordinary women without background and beauty still have fewer opportunities for work and promotion, because the concept of "woman is the womb" is engraved in the DNA of the male-dominated society and women are automatically classified by employers and society into families before making their own choices. The essence of Alma's journey to the top is the struggle of ordinary women to pursue their dreams and fulfill their desires. The shared "second sex" status of women makes the Chinese female viewers of *Why Women Kill II* able to put themselves in Alma's shoes even though

they have political and cultural ideological differences with the U.S., experience the control over their own destiny and succeed, which are unattainable in reality. Women hope to get pleasure and the inspiration that they can control their own future from *Why Women Kill II*.

Secondly, the female characters can wake up and leave men to exist as independent individuals. Alma goes from a life of husband and daughter, with no friends and no social circle, to successfully making it into the fancy club; from initially having to ask her husband's opinion on buying a dress to finally coercing him to kill; from only being the veterinarian's wife to being a notorious murderess on the news. Rita succeeded in marrying up when she was young and beautiful, but ultimately she is willing to leave Carlo's millions to run away with true love she thinks. Dee is able to keep awake when Scooter blandishes and finally offers to break up with this playboy.

The sixth national census shows that 2.47% of women over the age of 30 are single, about two times higher than the results of the fifth; according to 2019 civil affairs statistics, China's divorce rate reached 3.36%. Getting married and having children seems no longer to be the only choice for Chinese women. The pursuit of true love, economic independence and ideological independence are three main reasons. Firstly, more women are unwilling to improvise, putting quality before quantity. In order to meet true love and if there is no so-called true love, they prefer to be alone. The most important thing to achieve this is the economic base. There is a famous line in *Little Women* from Aunt March, women must work hard. If they don't, they will get married. I don't have to because I am wealthy. As women can earn a high income on their own, they do not need to be confined to the family and rely on husbands and sons. More and more women choose to invest in themselves, making themselves more powerful. Men are no longer the sole source of income at home and women can also be the backbone of the family. At this time, the average man and their wealth are nothing to the successful women. Last, Chinese women are generally educated and are reluctant to settle down in the family as unpaid nannies. With more choices and broader views, women become economically and spiritually independent and possess the ability to judge and choose their own life goals independently, rather than being pressured by family and society. Marriage for women, especially for highly educated women, may mean sacrificing more time and energy, career stagnation or dual pressure on family and career, which reduce their inner happiness. [6]

Throughout *Why Women Kill II*, the theme is different from the first season of marriage and gender. The second season focuses on women themselves, creating the Elysian Park Garden Club, a women's scene which highlights the characteristics of the female group. The content is more free from males, and male characters no longer serve as the driving force for the development of the story, nor do they constitute the motivation for all the actions of the women, which accord with the theme of women's awakening.

2.3. The Lopsided Development of Chinese Feminism - The Generalization of the Circle of "Socialite"

Similar to Gu Jia's desperation to join the circle of wealthy housewives in the Chinese drama "Nothing but Thirty", Alma is desperate to join the Elysian Park Garden Club. Ironically, what the club does is merely a group of bored and pretentious rich wives spend their afternoons drinking and gossiping. They are only with people in their own class, and a poor, plain woman like Alma would never fit in. But from the moment Alma decides to join the club and begins to erase her original look, she craves more, becomes insatiable and the image she creates is unvarnished and contrary to her original intention. In order to possess a fancy and fashionable dress as the only way to be remembered and to enter the celebrity circle, Alma, who receives money from her husband, enters a high-end clothing store for the first time and is shocked by the sky-high price, so she memorizes the details of the dress and buys cloth for making the dress, which is also known as fake. In order to have face, Alma steals antiques and paintings from her late neighbor Ms. Yost's house to decorate her home and wears Ms. Yost's high-end clothes, becoming *The Man in Case*.

The term debutante is originally used to describe those elegant women in authority who often attend various fashionable social gatherings. However, the current definition of celebrity seems to infinitely enlarge appearance and wealth but discard morality and education.[7]

Nowadays, there are numerous indistinguishable celebrities online, Hermes in hand, Rolex on wrist and Bentley behind the wheel. The number of people who can have luxury goods (forgeries perhaps) in photos that are endowed with a social value is increasing with the help of group buying or sharing. Besides beauty, high level and consumption of clothing, food, housing and transportation and superior social circle have become the touchstone of successful women. To gain access to powerful resources and social contacts, some women squeeze their wallets or even violate the bottom line of morality and challenge the authority of law, which is ultimately vanity. The generalization of the celebrity circle, a phenomenon of group disguise that widely exists in social media, reflects the identity anxiety, psychological imbalance and identity-seeking demands of some people [8]. It is society that writes a blank check for this vanity. People will be amazed, praise and admire your social status because they default it is a leap of status accomplished by your own efforts and real talent and they default rich people are naturally superior, which is actually a distortion of values.

When more and more people find that they can realize the leap by creating a false persona, the public's trust is depleted, and pretentious posers are incessantly suspected. After years of hiding behind the mask, it is even difficult for oneself to distinguish. If not rely on one's own efforts, daydreams will be cracked and one ends up being a joke and gossip.

3 CONCLUSION

This paper innovatively takes the development of Chinese feminism as a starting point and adopts the textual close reading approach to explore the profound reasons why the second season of *Why Women Kill* has gained a large Chinese audience and heated discussions which can be concluded as the connotation of beauty, the awakening of women's self-awareness and the abnormal development of Chinese feminism.

Through research and analysis, this paper finds that there are still many people judging women only by their appearance and many people pretending to be socialites, smearing women and feminism in the current society. The development of Chinese feminism is at its highest level in history while facing unprecedented but unavoidable problems. *Why Women Kill II* catches these pain points and reaps a large number of fans, which not only shows that feminist TV series in China and abroad need to pay great attention to social reality, reflect social problems and provide possible solutions, but also shows that the benign development of Chinese feminism urgently needs social attention and joint forces. This work hopes to accumulate experience for similar feminist-themed TV dramas in China and abroad, provide a reference for future studies of Chinese feminism or literary works using Chinese feminist perspectives, and jointly promote the further development of Chinese feminism and raise the level of gender awareness in society.

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