

Analysis of the portrayal of women in "Snow Country" through the lens of Mono-no-Aware: Taking the Youko as an Example

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Abstract. Mono-no-Aware is central to traditional Japanese culture and aesthetic consciousness, as well as the essence of Japanese literature. All aspects of Kawabata Yasunari's masterpiece "Snow Country" are infused with the concept of Mono-no-Aware. The trend is most visible in the depiction of the female figure, Youko. In this study, we analyze the aesthetic consciousness of Mono-no-Aware in the portrayal of characters from both the front and the side, knowing they mainly appear in the aspects of "view of life" and "the interplay of sorrow and beauty".

Keywords. Mono-no-Aware, aesthetic consciousness, "Snow Country", female portrayal.

1. Introduction

Mono-no-Aware was born in the aristocratic culture of the Heian period. It is a fundamental idea that pervades traditional Japanese culture, aesthetic consciousness, and the essence of Japanese literature [1,2]. Mono-no-Aware is defined as "a mixed feeling of love, pity, and sympathy for the subject of one's feelings" by Ye Weiqu. This subject could be a person, an object, or the social environment. In a nutshell, it is a profound philosophical feeling brought about by the interaction of circumstances. It's also a concept that's taken over Japanese literature. The theme of "Mono-no-Aware" permeates all aspects of the work. It is a starting point for understanding Mono-no-Aware's aesthetic consciousness, such as the depiction of natural scenery, characters, and their fate. We will look at Youko, a typical representative of the Mono-no-Aware culture in "Snow Country," in this study. We will examine the traditional Japanese Mono-no-Aware culture embodied in the portrayal of the female character in conjunction with the actual text context, with the goal of better understanding Japanese aesthetic consciousness.

2. The depiction of characters from frontage

2.1 Appearance description:

E.g. Since the girl was thus diagonally opposite him, Shimamura could as well have looked directly at her. When the two of them came on the train, however, something coolly piercing about her beauty had startled Shimamura, and as he hastily lowered his eyes, he had seen the man's ashen fingers clutching at the girl's. Somehow it seemed wrong to look their way again [3].

This is Youko's physical appearance. The author uses the rhetorical technique of "something coolly piercing" to depict Youko's beauty, extending from the visual to the feeling, bringing a burst of coolness to readers' hearts and brightening their eyes. Even the word "pierce" has shocking power [4].

In Chinese or English, we rarely use the word "pierce" to describe a woman's beauty, which is a uniquely Japanese aesthetic (Mono-no-Aware). Youko's beauty conveys the sense that "it can be seen from afar but is not profane" in Japanese traditional aesthetics. To the point of stabbing and to the heart, beauty This beauty is pure and moving, evoking a romanticized, dreamlike vision of women. This extreme, pure beauty echoes strongly with the later text of Youko's "death in the fire." Because "life" and "beauty" are both fleeting, the beauty of death and desolation reflects the concept of life. To some extent, Mono-no-Aware's aesthetic consciousness can thus be understood as a point of view on life.

2.2 the depiction of characters through details

E.g. It was such a beautiful voice that it struck one as sad. In all its high resonance, it seemed to come echoing back across the snowy night.

Youko's voice is described in detail here. They make people feel like Youko is a fluttering, dreamlike existence, which covers the character with a sad emotional tone. Youko's voice is so beautiful that one can't help but feel sad. This is a Japanese aesthetic as well, a sense of "Mono-no-Aware." In Western culture, "beauty" is associated with enthusiasm and positive energy, whereas "beauty" is frequently associated with negative and sad emotions in Eastern culture, including Japanese culture. "Sadness is beauty." There is a sense of beauty, and sadness is the extreme of beauty. "Sorrow and beauty are connected," according to Mono-no-Aware culture, and the "blend of sorrow and beauty" is a feature of Japanese literature. These detailed descriptions also show how the aesthetic sense of sorrow is reflected in the portrayal of characters.

E.g. The light moved across the face, though not enough to light it up. It was a distant, cold light. As it sent its small ray through the pupil of the girl's eye, as the eye and the light were superimposed one on the other, the eye became a weirdly beautiful bit of phosphorescence on the sea of evening mountains.

Here's a closer look at Yoko's eyes. The author uses a metaphorical technique to compare Yoko's eyes in cold light to phosphorescent light (here, the light emitted by fireflies), and the image of Youko, which is a beautiful and pure fly off the paper, creates a beautiful dynamic painting. The firefly metaphor adds a touch of melancholy to the scene.

Because fireflies, like cherry blossoms, represent the transience and fragility of a beautiful life in Japanese culture, the author compares Youko's eyes to the phosphorescence of fireflies, implying that Youko's lives are fleeting. The novel's use of metaphors in character portrayal demonstrates how Mono-no-Aware's aesthetic sense pervades all aspects of characterization.

2.3 Action description

E.g. Now and then it fell loose or slipped down over his nose, and almost before he had time to signal his annoyance the girl gently rearranged it. The process was repeated over and over, automatically, so often that Shimamura, watching them, almost found himself growing impatient. Occasionally the bottom of the overcoat in which the man's feet were wrapped would slip open and fall to the floor, and the girl will quickly pull it back together. It was completely natural, as if the two of them, quite insensitive to space, meant to go forever, farther and farther into the distance.

Here is a description of Youko taking care of Yukio. Youko's love and care for Yukio can be seen in phrases such as "gently rearranged," "repeated over and over," and "quickly pull it back together," which all reveal Youko's pure and sincere love for Yukio. Youko continues to care for Yukio with all her heart and soul, even after he becomes gravely ill. After he died, she went to the cemetery every day. Although Youko and Yukio's relationship ends tragically, it represents humanity's most genuine and moving emotion. That is the essence of beauty.

Youko dies beautifully in a fire at the end of the novel, leaving people with regret and sadness, which is sorrow. Sorrow is beautiful in Japanese literature. Perhaps this is the effect that the author wishes to achieve with Mono-no-Aware. The perspective of "mingling sorrow and beauty" is formed by one beauty and one sorrow. According to Kawabata Yasunari, "death is the highest art, a manifestation of beauty," a kind of aesthetic "mourning." The author uses death to preserve Youko's purity and beauty, and death is a kind of permanent freedom, which also reflects a kind of Mono-no-Aware view of life [5].

3. Side descriptions

3.1 Through descriptions of the environment

E.g. The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay white under the night sky.

At the end of the novel, Youko dies beautifully in a fire, leaving people with regret and sadness, which is sorrow. In Japanese literature, sadness is beautiful. Perhaps the author intends to achieve this effect with "Mono-no-Aware." One beauty and one sorrow form the "mingling of sorrow and beauty" perspective. Kawabata Yasunari believes that "death is the highest art, a manifestation of beauty," a kind of aesthetic "mourning." The author uses death to preserve Youko's purity and beauty, and death represents a kind of permanent freedom that also reflects a Mono-non-Aware view of life.

The novel's social setting is a remote and seemingly isolated snow country. It's a snowy setting with everything seemingly silent, like an earthly fairyland. The novel describes the pleasantries between Youko and the stationmaster, as well as Youko's "such a beautiful voice that it struck one as sad" voice and other characters, making her image stand out in this unique setting [6]. On a snowy night, Youko and the stationmaster's natural pleasantries make people feel warm, portraying the image of a kind and friendly woman, and the description of Youko's beautiful voice echoing in the snowy night enhances Youko's image, making it more beautiful and moving, pure, and clean.

In short, the author portrays Youko's pure, clean, and perfect character image by describing the "sad and beautiful" environment of the snow country.

3.2 Through the eyes of others' descriptions

E.g. This is the protagonist's description of Youko's image. "The face appeared transparent as well—but was it?" through the protagonist's point of view. Shimamura, the protagonist, feels this way because Youko's image is so flawless, so perfect, that he thinks he's watching a movie. Through Shimamura's eyes, we appreciate Youko's pure, ethereal beauty, which is a purely spiritual symbol, an unreachable, dreamlike existence.

The author says little about Youko. Shimamura's point of view, from their first meeting in the snowy country to Youko's death in the fire. We see the sadness in the life of a purely beautiful woman, a reflection of Mono-no-Aware culture [7]. Author Kawabata describes the burned Youko as "a phantom of the non-real world," whose "inner life is transforming into something else." Her life is compared to the Milky Way galaxy. Youko's death exemplified the Mono-no-Aware culture. However, we cannot deny that the ending is depressing. The author gives his characters a tragic tone, particularly the kind-hearted lower-class women. Connect their sorrow with innocence and simplicity, expressing distinctly soft female beauty and creating a touching artistic image of beauty. This epitomizes the ultimate beauty of "Mono-no-Aware" and its outlook on life.

Cut off by the face, the evening landscape moved steadily by around its outlines. The face appeared transparent as well, but was it really? Shimamura had the illusion that the evening landscape was actually passing over his face, and the flow did not stop to let him be sure it was not. Since there was no glare, Shimamura forgot that it was a mirror he was looking at. The girl's face seemed to be out in the flow of the evening mountains.

4. Conclusion

Finally, the novel depicts Youko's character primarily through five perspectives: frontal description (appearance, action, and details) and side depiction (environment and character side), which allows us to see Mono-no-Aware, a traditional Japanese culture. On the one hand, the "mourning" concept of life, i.e., the sorrow and beauty of Youko's life, reflects Mono-no-Aware culture. It is reflected, on the other hand, in the interplay of sorrow and beauty, that is, the "beauty" of the characters and the "sorrow" of the ending. It is hoped that this study will help us better understand Mono no Akaike culture in Japanese literature.

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