

The Aesthetics of Yuan Mei's Poem 'Moss'

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Abstract

Yuan Mei (袁枚), a poet and theorist of poetry during the Qianjia period of the Qing Dynasty, was once an official, but later resigned from his post to live in the Sui-Yuan Garden in Xiaocangshan, Nanjing. His poems cover a wide range of subjects, and his use of metaphors is very distinctive. Because he advocated the poetic ideas of "spirituality" and "temperament", his unique ideas promoted the development of poetry in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, and had far-reaching influence on the poetry world at that time. This paper takes Yuan Mei as the object of study, and discusses his poem Moss from the aesthetic ideas of nature, idyll, and the beauty of nature and spirit.



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Keywords: moss, nature, idyllic, sexuality, aesthetics

Introduction

Yuan Mei (1716-1798) was a representative of the "spiritual poetry" school in the Qing Dynasty. After he retired due to his unsuccessful career, he created a large number of poems and poems, and renamed the house he purchased "Suiyuan", which means "follow your heart". He bought a house and renamed it "Suiyuan", which means "follow your heart", and called himself "Suiyuan Elder". In his book "Poems from Suiyuan", he said, "From the 300 Psalms to the present day, poems are passed down by the spirit of the nature of those who are not related to the stacks." In short, it means that all the poems passed down from the 300 Psalms of the Book of Psalms to the present day are expressive of the spirit of nature, not shallow and general poetic theories. Therefore, "spiritual poetry" mainly expresses the poet's personality and truly reflects human emotions, i.e., the true nature. The beauty of Yuan Mei's poetry lies in its naturalness, and the small poems he created are characterised by their beautiful form, small selection of materials, novel ideas, real emotions, dynamic language, and attention to the observation of details. China has an old saying called "all things quietly observe are self-acquired", appreciation of art through the quiet observation into the realm of aesthetic interest, depends on the nourishment of culture and art, this paper through the Yuan Mei poem "moss" quietly observe all things, to understand the rhyme and mood in the verses,

all thanks to the fun from nature, feel the beauty of life, advocate simplicity, serenity, The following analyses the value of its related artistic aesthetics and discusses the influence of poetry on aesthetics.

1. Interpretation of the natural beauty of Moss

Natural beauty is the most beautiful thing on earth, impregnated with aesthetic meaning, conveying our aspiration - the harmony and unity of man and nature. Yuan Mei, who valued "spirit" and "emotion" in poetry, believed that poetry should be closely related to life, and advocated natural, fresh, easy and fluent poetry from the aspect of artistic expression, just as the content of this poem "Moss":

The sun doesn't go anywhere, but youth comes at the right time.

Moss flowers are as small as rice, but they also bloom like peonies.

Moss--Qing Yuan Mei

This is a poem with a picture in the poem, named "Moss", in which the natural objects such as sun, rice and peony are simple and unadorned, and the small moss flower, as tiny as rice, contains a powerful force, implying that even if it is as tiny as moss, it should bloom like peony, which can be interpreted carefully to discover the poetic ideas contained in it. A careful reading of the poem will reveal the underlying poetic ideas, giving the poem a sense of picture.

The poem seems to be short, each word is not necessarily remote, but everywhere shows the treatment of the finishing touch, the first line of the "day" and "youth" instantly creates a scene of time, at this time the poet has reached the realm of forgetting his behind, the heart of heaven and earth, that is, Zhuang Zi said: "the essence of the Way, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness, the darkness. That is, Zhuang Zi said the "big bright" state: "to the essence of the Tao, the fair and meditative, to the extreme of the Tao, faint and silent, no sight, no hearing, holding the spirit to quiet, the shape will be self-correct Be careful of your inner self, close your outer self, much knowledge is a failure, I will attempt for you to be on top of the great brightness" (Zhuangzi - Zaiyu). In such a state of mind, the "moss flowers" in the second line locates the tone of the whole poem in the seclusion from the mundane, borrowing the moss flowers to shape a person who seems to be unappetisingly clear and elegant, spiritual and wonderful. The poem cleverly employs the technique of highlighting key objects step by step, first highlighting the harsh environment in which the plant grows, creating an emotional connection with the reader, and at the same time supplementing it with a hint of ambiguity to render the level of the whole scene. The whole poem is serene and secluded, stripped down and condensed, with a profound meaning. Comparing the moss flower with peony, in this quiet and faraway alley, even though only the poet is independent and "forgetting things and self" is the main subject, there is also the empathy of "seeing the mountain is not a mountain", which tells the world that even if they are in the adversity, they have to give themselves a kind of open-minded outlook that is not inferior to the peony. This is to tell the world that even in adversity, one should give oneself an open-minded view that is not inferior to the peony.

The Analects of Confucius says: "Do not be afraid of not having your own place in the world, but seek to become a person of talent and virtue worthy of being known." The translation is: "Do not be afraid of not having your own position in the world, but seek your own way of establishing yourself

in the world; do not be afraid of not being known by others, but only seek to be known as a person of talent and virtue". Yuan Mei's poem was composed in a scene, and then the scene was blended with the scene, so he borrowed things as a metaphor for his will, and when he read the poem, he entered into the poem, and from the "form" in the poem, he led to the "God" behind it, i.e., the form and the God are both complete and the rhyme is vivid. He is in pursuit of independence and freedom of spirit, even if the moss flower is as small as rice, as tiny as dust, there will always be a corner in the nature to put our existence, but also learn to blossom themselves, to prove their own value.

The poetry world in the Sheng Tang Dynasty can be said to be full of poets, in which landscape and garden poetry has made a long-term development, and Wang Wei's landscape and garden poetry is unique in many poets' landscape and garden poetry with its elegant natural beauty. The outline of natural beauty in his poems is always full of poetry and picturesque, thanks to his high attainments in painting. Su Shi, one of the "Eight Great Poets of the Tang and Song Dynasty", who is the main representative of the famous bold and free school, once commented on Wang Wei, saying, "Taste Moqizi's poems, there are paintings in the poems. When you look at Mochizuki's paintings, there is poetry in the paintings." It can be seen that Wang Wei had cleverly implanted painting techniques in his landscape and idyllic poems, so that the viewers could feel the beauty of nature directly conveyed by the poems as if they were in the realm. Specifically, painting is concerned with light and shadow, distance and nearness, movement and static, intensity and lightness, etc. The beauty of painting is at Wang Wei's fingertips, and the so-called "poetry and painting" can probably be understood in Wang Wei's works. In the poem "Autumn Night in the Mountain Dwelling", he created a vivid picture of autumn, "After the new rain on the empty mountain, the weather comes late in autumn. The moon shines between the pines, and the clear spring flows over the stones. The bamboo clamour returns to the raccooness, the lotus moves under the fishing boat." It depicts the openness of the mountains, giving people a sense of freshness, coolness and nature, and also explains the season in which the poem was written. The poem not only shapes a refreshing and bright natural scenery, but also has a meticulous description of the representative scenery, as if it has vitality, making the whole picture more spiritual, jumping and full of interest. The whole poem is much different from the common winter scene, and even has more unique flavour. Through this description, the natural scenery becomes full of vigour, which reflects the poet's state of mind and feelings during the creation of the poem, and also lets the readers fully feel the poet Wang Wei's love and closeness to the natural scenery.

The same sentiment can be felt in Yuan Mei's poem "Moss", which directly anthropomorphises the moss flower's tenacious vitality, but shows Yuan Mei's immense love for the moss flower, i.e., "I see the green hills are more charming, and I expect that the green hills will see me as well", and the word "learn" makes the whole poem more humane than Wang Wei's "Autumn Night at Mountain Dwelling". The word "learn" makes the whole poem more full of humane flavour compared to Wang Wei's "Autumn Night in the Mountain Dwelling", and the whole poem, in just a few words, sketches out the realm of the lane, and the beauty of the nature can be seen in the poet's deep heritage.

2. The idyllic beauty of "Moss" interpretation

"Moss" is a natural expression of the poet Yuan Mei's inner feelings, sincere, honest, not pretentious, the pursuit of true nature and "poor is good for itself, and to achieve is to help the world," the traditional concept is not contrary to the ancient hermit to maintain the spirit of quiet and free personality.

Yuan Mei's career as an official is incompatible with the high and pure interest, coupled with unrecognised talent, the poor career leads to inner depression and bitterness, the latter half of his life to choose to resign from the city hidden life path and his life experience is closely related. Yuan Mei's poem "Feelings" says: "An official runs around with empty skin and bones; all things are difficult to read the years." It clearly expresses the poet's lament for the hardship of the officialdom, and sends his love to the joy of idylls and the tour of mountains and waters. There is helplessness in the sentence, but also to see its free and open attitude towards life, put down at the right time, in order to win the freedom of life, between the vertical and horizontal trade-offs, contains a rich philosophy of life.

Idylls can be traced back to the philosophical and artistic spirit of Zhuangzi, an important founder of the Taoist school in the pre-Qin period, whose unique ideas, humanistic concerns and aesthetic tendencies set the tone of the spirit and aesthetic character of classical Chinese art and depicted the "free" realm of life and the philosophical outlook of the Taoist school of thought, which greatly contributed to the awakening of the artistic subject and influenced people's aesthetic and artistic creation in the Wei and Jin periods. It also depicted the realm of life and the philosophical concept of Taoism, which greatly contributed to the awakening of the artistic subject, and also influenced people's aesthetics and artistic creation in the Wei and Jin dynasties. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, although Confucianism still played a dominant role, it lost its supremacy and was in relative decline in politics and ideology, while Xuanxue and Buddhism became the two major ideological and cultural forces outside Confucianism, influencing the literary creations of later generations. The spirit of idyllic poetry was inherited from the metaphysics of the Wei and Jin dynasties, in which people experienced nature with a dashing mind and metaphysical meanings. The poet Xie Lingyun of the Northern and Southern Dynasties was the prototype of idyllic poetry, and the best exponent of idyllic poetry at the end of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Tao Yuanming, wrote: "I am not suitable for the common rhyme, but I love the hills and mountains by nature." Not only indifferent to fame and fortune, but also peaceful and happy, advocating nature, leaving behind the "I can not for the five buckets of rice bend down" of the best words, including his reading is "good reading, do not seek to understand, every have a good idea, will be happy to pen", the zither is a stringless zither, a great deal of spontaneity for the meaning of the poem. Just like the poem: "the sea is wide enough for the fish to leap, the sky is high enough for the birds to fly", there is no need to cope with the situation, no need to pretend to cover up, no need to hide, do what you want without going beyond the rules, this is the natural situation that Tao Yuanming's poems show in his daily life, which forms the uniqueness of Tao Yuanming's idyllic poems that are kind and natural and full of poetic meaning of life. It can be seen that Tao Yuanming's idyllic poems have already "developed the sense of nature from a philosophical realm and an aesthetic realm to a living realm"¹. In other words, the natural realm in Tao Yuanming's poems has been fully integrated into the life, which is a harmonious unity of the living of the natural realm and the naturalisation and aestheticisation of the living realm.

¹ Qian Zhixi: *The Pre-Tang View of Life and the Theme of Literary Life*, [M], Beijing: Oriental Publishing House, 1997, p. 319.

Yuan Mei wrote "Moss" in a unique way after returning to his hometown, integrating the personality of aloofness and tranquility, tenacity and clumsiness into his small life. The ancients paid attention to the unity of man and nature, living in harmony with nature, the idyllic poem reflects Yuan Mei's positive vision and emotions to appreciate the beauty of idyllic landscapes, and Zhuangzi's concept of "simplicity and the world can not compete with the beauty of the world" coincides with a new approach and style to create a new landscape idyllic poem, the philosophical implications of the poem permeate the reader to recall the beauty and appreciation of nature. The philosophical meaning of the poem permeates the reader's appreciation of the beauty and nature, and the dialectical and united artistic expression of removing the rough and extracting the essence and simplifying the complexity into simplicity creates a unique artistic beauty, and the poem, once it is philosophical, also has the blessing of the very poetics.

The performance of poetry in various periods of history is diversified, and the theoretical views of many words are easily noticed and recognised by the world, but things or phenomena which are commonplace and not perceived by the people can sometimes reflect people's deeper ideological concepts in a more genuine way. This is also true for the creative form of poetry and lyrics. Poetry and song are the products of history, with deep cultural meanings. When a particular form of poetry echoes with the way of feeling of the current group and the spirit of the times, it will be generally accepted, which is the basis for the prosperity of some forms of poetry in a particular era. In the literary world of the Qing Dynasty, some creative forms were fashionable, and these creative forms were often intertwined and used at the same time, of course, such as the idyllic poetry creative form appeared before the Qing Dynasty, but until the Qing Dynasty, another way to the popularity of the situation, which is a phenomenon worth noting, because these creative forms reflect the people's interest in the poetry of that time is very different. The Qing Dynasty, as the last dynasty of the feudal society of China, since the beginning of the Wei and Jin metaphysics, the style of landscape and idyllic poetry in the Qing Dynasty became more common, and the prosperity of the poems and poetic researches created was unprecedented. In the Qing Dynasty, Zhao Yi's "On Poetry" said, "There are talented people in the rivers and mountains, and each of them has led the style for hundreds of years." It can be seen that the poetic style advocated by Yuan Mei during this period had a profound influence on the poetry world at that time.

3. Interpretation of the Sexual and Spiritual Beauty of "Moss"

"Aesthetics itself is a kind of practical botany, though the object is not the plant but the work of man."² When Yuan Mei expressed the basic knowledge of moss in his poems, he used a way that was easy for the public to relate to, appealing not only to reason, but also to the moss's aura-filled expression of emotion, "That is why Zhou Ji said, 'When you first learn a word, you seek emptiness, and when it is emptiness, you will have an exchange of aura.' Aura exchange is when the object presents the life of the soul, when the sense of beauty is born."³ This pursuit of expression is more of a human attitude and philosophical thinking, as described by Mr Zhu Guangqian: "There is a Chinese proverb that says, 'It is better for the King Kong to look angrily than for the Bodhisattva to lower his eyebrows.' The so-called angry eyes is to show; the so-called lowered eyebrows is to be

² [French] Danner, *Philosophy of Art*, [M], translated by Fu Lei, Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2016, p. 19.

³ Zong Baihua: *The Realm of Art*, [M], Beijing: Peking University Press, 1989, p. 177.

subtle. Whenever one looks at the image of a deity with a bowed head and closed eyes, the impression created is often particularly profound."⁴ The quiet subtlety revealed through the moss in the poem can be a spiritual baptism for the poet, so that he can appreciate that artistic images can purify the mind and are truly natural and touching.

Poetry speaks of true nature is to emphasise the inner emotions, "Poetry has a very plain, but deep meaning." Borrowing moss to reason is the characteristic of this poem "Moss", which blandly uses metaphor and anthropomorphism. Due to its smallness and poor living environment, it cannot normally enjoy the wind, rain and sunshine, and through the four seasons, it tenaciously and confidently realises its own values and ideals amidst the adversity. The artistic expression of this aria is full of interest and contains such eternal propositions as subjectivity and objectivity, advantage and disadvantage, appearance and essence, smallness and greatness. The style of the whole poem compares the moss to himself, with the allusion to Cao Zhi's "Seven Steps Poem" in the Three Kingdoms period: "Boil beans and hold them as a soup, and strain the beans to make juice. Beanstalks burn under the kettle, beans cry in the kettle. They were born from the same root, why are they so anxious to fry each other?" There is a similarity and similarity between these two poems. Cao Zhi was forced to compose a poem full of grief and indignation over his own situation and the hand-to-hand conflict. Whether borrowing beans as a metaphor for oneself or moss as a metaphor for others, what needs to be emphasised is that the poet's true nature is revealed, and the thoughtfulness of what makes a person a person, which is also the reason why classic poems are always touching.

Li Bai, the emotional poet who has been able to resonate for thousands of years, said in his poem, "The light of the bright moon in front of the bed is suspected to be the frost on the ground; raise your head to look at the bright moon, and lower your head to think of your hometown." The poem is extremely simple and catchy, the poet transforms the scenery into a lyrical poem, unconsciously integrating his thoughts, ideas and feelings into it, and its spiritual connotations and the extremely sweeping spiritual sentiments and heights contained behind it are marvellous to behold.

The content of a poem's subject matter is good or bad, and the circulation or not, depends on the nature of the real basis of the poet's pen whether or not the spirit of the living, that is, whether or not to follow the "sexual spirit" of the principle of creativity. "This reflects the gradual emancipation of ideas and the continuous opening up of the social atmosphere at that time..... He also advocated the true temperament, true learning, and knowledge of poetry in writing, and as a result, it guided Qing poetry to develop in the direction of elegance and flexible style....."⁵ It also reflects the main characteristics of Qing poetry. Yuan Mei, as one of the most influential figures in Qing poetry, greatly contributed to the development of Qing poetry. Yuan Mei's resignation from his official post and return to his hermitage had built up a deep poetic background for his poetry, which laid the foundation for his unique school of "Spiritual Poetry". He entered poetry with profound literary skills, and created a realm of artistic beauty for his spiritual poems. Nature is a kind of high demand for formal beauty, and in the openness, leisure and lightness of nature, he started from the harmony of content and form to show the perfect unity of spirit and form, and showed his noble, reserved, and dashing and uninhibited feelings in the best possible way. It is said that Yuan Mei's poems

⁴ Zhu Guangqian: *Zhu Guangqian quanji* (The Complete Works of Zhu Guangqian) (Volume 1), [M], Hefei: Anhui Education Press, 1987, p. 65.

⁵ Qian Zhonglian and Yan Ming, *A New Essay on Yuan Mei* [J], *Literary Heritage*, 1994, No. 2, pp. 98-99.

created a new era, and his poems promoted the development of poetry in the Qing Dynasty and wrote a brilliant chapter in the long history of Chinese literature. Yuan Mei's political ambitions were not met with success, so he retired to the mountains and sent his love to the landscape, a large number of poems written during this period have a high artistic value, and have a greater impact on future generations, which is not unrelated to the influence of the times, and it can even be said that it was the socio-political climate at that time that created the reclusive and avoiding the world of the Yuan Mei to see the magnificence of the mountains and rivers and the beauty of the poetic science.

Conclusion

"The beauty of the art form is inferior to the appreciation of the content of life, and elegant interest gives way to worldly reality."⁶ Art reflects life, and the core of art is the "beauty" of life. Yuan Mei takes nature as the beauty, idyll as the beauty, and spirit as the beauty, which is enough to show that the poem "Moss", from the subject matter, content, means of expression to the aesthetic consciousness, shares the artistic characteristics of the "spirit" school of poetry, i.e., it unites the truth, goodness, beauty and true nature. It is enough to show that the poem "Moss", from the subject matter, content, means of expression to aesthetic consciousness, shares the artistic characteristics of the "Spiritual" school of poetry, that is to say, it unites the truth, goodness, beauty and true nature, which is of vital significance for the construction of contemporary aesthetics and values, and there are at least three aspects that can be learnt from it. The second is that the artist in the creation of the existing experience and skills can be appropriate to put down, with the most sincere creative approach to creation, the third is the creation of a quiet heart into the emotions, so that the formation of art works in the realm of form and technology, so that will create more and better works of art.

Acknowledgment

NO

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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⁶ Li Zehou, The Course of Beauty [M], Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2009, p. 193.