

Multiple Themes under the First-person's Perspective - On Roland's *Green House*

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Abstract. Taking Roland's *Green House* as the object of study, this paper has an intensive reading of the text of this work to analyze its theme. From three perspectives, this paper thoughts it contains the themes in three aspects. First are the contradictions between the nature and artificiality, natural instincts and etiquette; second are loneliness of life and the tragedy of communication lacking; and third is the theme of growth.

Roland is one of Taiwan's essayists. When researchers discussed about Roland, the most they discussed are her essays. In mainland academics, Roland's novels are rarely mentioned. However, the same with many famous writers in Taiwan, she is also a generalist. This paper discussed about her novella *Green House*.

This novel of Roland was published in 1969, which was a story about "my" cousin Xian Gang. In fifteen years old, my stepmother married my father, so I had a family relationship between my stepmother and her relatives. "I" began to recognize my cousin, and witnessed the changing process of the relationship between him and Chen Lvfen from reconciliation to separation. In adult's eyes, cousin Xian Gang was a prototype of "bad boy" who was very rebellious and did not follow the planned road of his father. His parents and his wife did not like him and he had a very tight relationship with the family. In the story, Chen Lvfen is the role of a lover. She had a similar temperament with my cousin and love each other deeply, who did not like the life with etiquette rules in the family. But after all that kind of free life is far away from reality. The dream they knitted in the harsh reality eventually burst, and that green house symbolized the nature eventually abandoned.

This novel is not long and the story is not complicated, but after intensive reading, the connotation of a simple story is not simple. This paper intends to explore the subject of this novel from three angles.

Contradictions between the nature and artificiality, natural instincts and etiquette

In traditional Chinese culture, the contradictions between the nature and artificiality, natural instincts and etiquette exist since the ancient times. In the pre-Qin era, the representatives of Confucius and Mencius desired to construct a complete set of social norms by artificially setting the etiquette, while the Taoism pursued the unity with the nature to release the constraints of this artificial etiquette on human nature, so as to achieve the normalization of nature.

In this novel, cousin Xian Gang and Chen Lvfen presented the pursuit of nature and the state of life eager to live according to their own nature, but my cousin's father, cousin's wife Shao Peiyu and her brother Shao Jingcheng represented another opposite life state, which was the life state paid attentions on the etiquette and rules. The author viewed this question from "my" perspective who was a fifteen-year-old child, which is even if adults repeatedly told us how cousin Xian Gang is disobedient and let us not play with him, we are always partial to the former. In this article, it reflected the opposite of the two kinds of life states everywhere, and the author narrated on "my" perspective, which always praised the former and was dissatisfied on the latter emotionally.

In the works, when we first came to elder uncle's house, the wordless oppressive atmosphere enveloped the whole house, "because the family behaves correctly and cautiously, we also have to desperately remain courteous".^[1] Compared with those law-abiding adults, our children are mostly closed to the nature and eager to freedom and unconstraint. Only when my cousin arrived, he "opens that milky window", and "the house cool down immediately".^[1] Carefully analyzed here, in

fact, the arrival of cool breeze meant the open of window towards nature. However, the nature is incompatible with the people obeyed rules and laws, so it is opposed by them. Such kind of accusation “when you came home, you took home a big mess” was out of their mouths. This apparent contrast in the text can be found everywhere. In the elder uncle’s house, we were always restrictive and restraining, but always felt relaxed and comfortable in that green house symbolized the nature. Through this comparison, the author seemed to disclose a message to us, which is this kind of lifestyle paid attention to the red tape is not integrated with the life state we should have.

By analyzing the character Xian Gang, this point can also be seen. Xian Gang liked to do things according to his own ideas, rather than being forced to do things by his father. “I was forced to read this or that, and no matter how good the book is, it lost the magic if I was forced to read. I wanted to unconditionally reading or I want to play unconditionally.”^[1] When Xian Gang grew up, he was not the so-called ignorant playboy in the community, but was very interested in the architecture and has been live frugally and engaged in architectural design together with Chen Lvfen. His ideal on the architecture is also that “it should have changes to build houses, is not the blind pursuit of fashion, and is not the style content with habits”.^[1] But for the world paid attention to face and status, construction was a humble profession. His father and his wife’s requirement were to go to school according to the popular opinion and to be an official. The two are diametrically conflict, which also reflects the contradictions between the nature and artificiality, natural instincts and etiquette.

When I first came into the green house, I felt that it was far away from our real world and it was a green dream. “It is so serene, happy and stays away from this world. They do not have any entertainment and their daily lives completely disobeyed rules.”^[1] Dream was inevitably vulnerable and one day would wake up from dreams sooner or later. While I have witnessed how the green house being discarded and how the green dream being shattered. In fact, the two worlds always have conflicts, and Xian Gang was in the natural world, but he was the son of a person in another world which paid attention to rules and etiquette, and also had a wife the same as his father. He and Chen Lvfen were kind and considerate, so finally under the oppression of the merciless reality of another world, they eventually chose to break up. “While people should live in the real world, nobody can always live in dreams, unless he is enough selfish. And people love to dream are mostly kind and are not willing to be selfish.”^[1] Finally, Xian Gang succumbed to the real world. He satisfied his father and wife’s request to go to school and to be an official, and even though that was away from his nature, it would make his family happier.

In the story, the author showed the contradictions between the nature and artificiality, natural instincts and etiquette, and further demonstrated that those good things in life how to be shattered in front of the cruel reality step by step.

The loneliness of life and the tragedy of communication lacking

A lot of people in the story appeared to be so lonely in “my” eyes. Although Xian Gang had a confidant Chen Lvfen, he is lonely, because his father only asked his son to obey himself without understanding the ideas of his son. In fact, his wayward father is lonelier, and “in this moment, I find his loneliness. We are too afraid of him, so when he is angry, no one dares to console him. Even when he is ill, no one dares to express concerns for him.”^[1] While his beautiful wife Shao Peiyu was also lonely. In “my” eyes, “all of her etiquette, her dignity, and her beauty are not match for her loneliness.”^[1] Not only Xian Gang did not belong to him, but also my stepmother considered only about their family honor and though that except Xian Gang, there was no ill treatments for Peiyu in the family. In fact, this argument itself was not fair to Peiyu, and was a kind of ill treatment. When Peiyu lamented over that her family let her to married Xian Gang was mainly because of the property of Xian Gang’s family, and her brother emphasized that the marriage between the two families was that “money is important, and the family status is also important.”^[1] Money and family status were important, and the unimportant is Peiyu’s feeling. “In Gang Xian’s family, she is an outsider”, and her family never considered about her own feelings, so the married daughter is as spilled water and the relationship with her family was not so important.

In my eyes, they were so lonely and so pathetic. And in fact, this kind of loneliness was because

of the lack of communication. The request of father to son is the obedience of everything and to follow the road arranged by him without letting any person violate against his arrangements. In front of him, all acts should be presentable, doing things according to the etiquette, and any substandard etiquette should be reprimanded. “He is not allowed someone to discover his mistake”.^[1] It was this kind of strong-headedness made he was not willing to communicate with his son, and the rebellion of his son would pull away from him and his son. And when his son celebrated his birthday at home, he still had the consistent attitude of reprimand and was dissatisfied with any performance of his son.

The same tragedy occurred on Xian Gang’s wife Shao Peiyu, whose husband was strange bedfellows with her. “I know the heavy sorrows hidden in the heart of cousin Xian Gang, but I also know the bitterness hidden in the heart of Peiyu. From the meet of them till now, their eyes were not directly contacted with each other. In the eyes of Shao Peiyu, they were full of contempt and condemnation.”^[1] Everything must take care of the etiquette, so Shao Peiyu could not easily express her feelings. When I first time expressed my sympathy, “she suddenly restrain the sadness showed on her face”, and “in the heart of glamorous and elegant woman Shao Peiyu, her self-esteem is more important than other’s sympathy.”^[1] Because of self-esteem and because of taking account of facial etiquette, so the obstacles occurred naturally in the communication, which also doomed to the loneliness of life. In Shao Peiyu’s heart, she was in love with Xian Gang. When I first stayed with Shao Peiyu alone in their bedroom, she involuntarily told me about all the advantages of her husband. When she returned to her parents, she also hoped that Xian Gang could pick her home. The lack of communication between people finally led to that kind of loneliness.

The theme of growth

The protagonist of the novel was cousin Xian Gang, but the perspective chosen in the novel was the first-person perspective. The novel was written and narrated in a strict first-person perspective. All thoughts were stood on my perspective, and from the story of cousin Xian Gang, it also highlighted the development process of “my” mind. From this point of view, the theme of growth was an important part of the novel.

In the beginning of the story, “I” was fifteen years old. This was a transitional period of life, On the one hand, it was a period walked to the adult world, and on the other hand, it still retained a lot of childish. When I started to understand the life of this family, I felt confused about some things and it was also in confused and puzzles, I began to slowly grow up. When I slowly intervened into Xian Gang’s story, “I was not clear whether I recognize ‘justice’, I begin to fall into the same ‘confused’ situation like them. I keep on thinking about their things, and I feel more convinced about the true and false, goodness and evilness of the human life affairs”^[1] In fact, this meant that I was walking into that complex adult world, where the attitude of life was completely different from the child’s world. Especially when I thought I was a “hero” to help Chen Lvfen leave Xian Gang and Chen Lvfen returned later, I had a kind of “stigma”. “Maybe everyone should have that kind of stigma after the fact proved his childishness. Especially although he was proved to be childish, he still did not understand why the right things he considered will make him show his childishness.”^[1] In fact, this kind of stigma in some perspective could be seen as a ceremony in the growth of a human.

When I saw Xian Gang’s father wanted to disown his son, my heart had too much confusion, and “how would a father forget the ecstasy when his son was born, and regard his son as a thorn in the eye to disown his son?”, and so many things in the adult’s world were difficult to understand by me who was fifteen years old. When I took out the writing-brush washer Xian Gang presented to his father on his birthday to restore his father’s ruthless decision, I suddenly found my powerlessness of doing anything. After this, I again realized that, “this thing only makes me once again prove my childishness and the pessimism of human friendship”.^[1] In the novel, the disappearance of the green house to some extent could be regarded as the end of my boyhood. In the final chapter “The end”, year after year, “I go back to my life and walk my own roads, I am growing up.” And when I said goodbye to Xian Gang, I suddenly said to my own Romeo: “if you pass your affection to

another, I will never ask you to stay^[1]”. In fact, this was what I learned in the story and I would never repeat the performance of them – the tragedy between Chen Lvfen and Xian Gang was also my growth.

In Marcos’s essay *What is initiation novel*, he defined the initiation novel as: “initiation novel shows that after the young protagonist going through some painful experiences, he changes his original world view, or changes his personality, or changes both; this change made him get rid of the innocence in the childhood, and finally led him to a real and complex world of adults.”^[2] From this perspective, this novel also had this theme of growth. With the carrying out the story of cousin Xian Gang, it was the mature of my mind and I gradually walked into the adult world. From the viewpoint of initiation novel, life was to walk to recognize the world from children’s world, and was the process from simplicity to complication. This was my growth, and although there were pains, it was inevitable.

By the intensive reading of the text above, and the analysis on the multiple connotations of the relatively sample text, the three themes analyzed in the above text were intertwined with each other. The contradictions between nature and etiquette and the tragedy of communication lacking between people were the important parts on the way of my growth. Roland was famous for essays in the literary world of Taiwan, and she did not have many novels, but they still had strong readabilities. In this paper, through analyzing the multiple themes of *Green House*, it still could see the theme throughout Roland’s works: concerning about the life and being full of life philosophy. This was the most appealing place touched readers, and was the most successful place in the novel.

References:

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[2] Rui Yuping: *Study of American initiation novel*, China Social Sciences Press, 2004.