"Rebellion and Awakening" under the Gaze: The Shifting Perspective of Female Characters in *The Case of a Missing Seventeen* and *Gone Girl*

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This paper probes into the transformation process and the deep meaning of the female characters in *The Case of a Missing Seventeen* and *Gone Girl*. The research shows that Wang Di and Amy realize the transformation from "being gazed at" to "gazer" through the disappearance in the Chinese and Western cultural backgrounds respectively. Wang Di's secret resistance reflects the traditional culture's suppression of women's self-awareness, while Amy controls the development of the story through carefully planned strategies, revealing the complex position of women in the marriage system. These two works show the struggle and breakthrough of women in the gender power structure, and emphasize the necessity of gender equality consciousness. Through a detailed study of role analysis and narrative strategies, this paper provides a new perspective for understanding the survival and growth of modern women in gender relations.

Keywords: feminist literary criticism, gender gaze, narrative strategy, cultural context

Introduction

Feminist literary criticism has been rising gradually since the 1970s. With the development of the feminist movement, its influence in the field of literary research has been expanding. As a critical theory, feminist literary criticism aims to reveal the shaping of female images in literary works, the implicit structure of gender power relations and its reflection on social culture. In traditional literature, especially in the field of mystery novels, female characters are often placed in the position of "being stared at" and "being manipulated". In the stories, women often exist as the object of desire, and their images are described and defined by the outside world through the male perspective, lacking autonomy and subjectivity (Feng, 2013, pp. 84-89+95). This kind of gaze makes women become a kind of being "watched" and "interpreted" in mystery novels, and their actions and choices are all trapped in the framework set by male logic.

Mystery fiction, as a special literary genre, usually centers its plot structure on mystery and the revelation of truth. The development of plot, the selection and setting of characters all serve to reveal the ultimate truth. Due to the logical rigor and complexity of such novels, the positioning and function of female characters are usually limited to the promoters or victims of the story plot, and they cannot get the right to speak in the overall narrative.

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This situation is particularly evident in the early classic Western mystery novels, such as Agatha Christie and Conan Doyle. On the other hand, in Chinese mystery novels, female characters are often given the image label of "good wife and good mother" or "demon woman and evil water" in traditional culture, and become the object of male social moral judgment. Therefore, the application of feminist literary criticism in the field of mystery novels not only reveals the limitations of traditional gender role positioning, but also triggers deep thinking on the narrative mode and gender discourse power of mystery novels.

Self-cognition and Awakening of Female Role

The Missing Girl of Seventeen: From "Obedience" to "Resistance"

In the story of the *The Case of a Missing Seventeen*, Wang Di's image shows the typical process of self-awareness awakening. As a young girl growing up in a traditional family background, her identity and self-existence have long been suppressed by patriarchal social norms. On the surface, Wang Di's disappearance seems to be an unprovoked rebellion and escape, but on a deep level, it reveals her profound reflection on social gender roles and exploration of her inner self. This act of disappearance is not only a rebellion against family and social pressure, but also an important turning point in her self-awareness.

Wang Di's resistance is not only reflected in the behavioral level, but also in the psychological level as the conflict and challenge to gender norms. The story of the *The Case of a Missing Seventeen* reveals the plight of many adolescent women through her image: they are made to be docile and obedient, but unconsciously lose the ability to think and act independently. By running away from home, Wang Di expresses her struggle against this dilemma in ways that seem destructive and irrational. This process actually reflects the gradual awakening of female characters under the oppression of gender roles, and through this action, they can liberate themselves from the passive social role and obtain a new subject identity (Zhou, 2023, pp. 88-91).

This act of disappearance not only challenges the existing norms, but also redefines the meaning of her own existence. Wang Di's transformation from the object of social gaze to an individual who actively questions her own identity shows the struggle and breakthrough women have experienced in the face of gender oppression. By reflecting on the traditional family structure, Wang Di's awakening process reveals the complex challenges adolescent women face in their pursuit of self-identity. Her story not only reflects a person's growth and struggle, but also provides an important perspective for a deeper discussion of gender roles, emphasizing the courage and persistence women need to pursue their own self-worth.

This analysis not only reveals the process of Wang Di's self-awareness awakening, but also shows how society's gaze on the young girl inspires her self-awareness awakening. Wang Di's resistance and exploration become an opportunity for her to pursue independence and subjectivity, challenge the definition of female identity by traditional gender roles, and provide reference and inspiration for other women facing similar dilemmas. Through this in-depth analysis of Wang Di's image, the work not only explores gender issues, but also provides a rich theoretical basis for promoting the discussion of female subjectivity.

Gone Girl: From "Passive" to "Dominant"

In *Gone Girl*, Amy's character presents a calculated female awakening, particularly in how she takes a leap of self-knowledge by taking control of her fate through her disappearance. Amy's disappearance is not only a direct reflection of her dissatisfaction with her married life, but also a profound reflection and redefinition of her

own identity. At the beginning of the story, Amy seems to be cast as a typical docile wife, living a seemingly perfect life. However, as the story progresses, readers come to realize that her gentle exterior hides deep anger and disappointment. Her dissatisfaction with her marriage is no accident, but an in-depth exploration of gender roles that reveals the complex position of women in marriage in Western society.

Through her well-planned disappearances, Amy transforms herself from a docile housewife into a "gazer" who takes charge of events. Her disappearance is a deliberate strategy to manipulate the perceptions and reactions of those around her in order to regain a voice in her family and society. Her disappearance not only frees her from the constraints of being a wife, but also puts her in charge of events in the narrative. In doing so, Amy successfully subverts other people's perceptions of her identity, showing the wisdom and ability of women in their pursuit of self-actualization.

In Amy's story, disappearance is not a denial of one's identity, but a redefinition of one's identity. She casts herself as a victim, but through a clever twist of narrative structure, she eventually reveals her initiative and control as a narrator. This strategy not only endows her with a new identity, but also enables her to gain a new initiative in social gender relations. Amy's story emphasizes women's resistance strategies in the face of marriage and gender role oppression. Through the manipulation of narrative structure and the reconstruction of their own image, they successfully realize self-redemption and re-shaping of identity.

The Enhancement and Breakthrough of Women's Right to Speak

Diversification of Narrative Perspectives

In mystery novels, the choice of the narrator not only affects the presentation of the story, but also determines the distribution of gender power relations in the narrative. In traditional mystery novels, men are usually set as the observers and puzzlers of events, while women are often portrayed as the participants or victims of events, becoming the "objects" in the eyes of male narrators. However, in the case of *The Case of a Missing Seventeen* and *Gone Girl*, the setting of female characters as narrators or narrative focus makes them not only become the protagonists of the story, but also control the interpretation of the events through their own perspectives.

In the story of the *The Case of a Missing Seventeen*, Girl changes the dominant position of the male detective or bystander in the traditional mystery novel, adopts the strategy of multi-perspective narration, and splices and combines the story with the perspectives of different characters (Sun, 2022, pp. 23-29). This diversity of perspectives makes the female character Wang Di, although she is placed in the position of the missing person, gradually presents a complex and three-dimensional appearance through the description of different narrators. In the novel, the perspective of the father focuses on the interpretation and worry of the daughter's behavior, the perspective of the mother is full of complex emotions about the growth of her daughter, and the perspective of the police and society has a strong sense of gender discipline. In these perspectives, Wang Di does not appear directly, but her absence becomes the core driving force behind the story. The narrators reveal their own biases and limitations while trying to understand the reason for Wangdi's disappearance.

Compared with the passive presentation of Wang Di from the perspective of others in the case of *The Case of a Missing Seventeen*, Amy in *Gone Girl* realizes the female character's self-expression with a more direct narrative strategy (Zuo & Zhu, 2020, pp. 72-77). The novel is narrated from a dual perspective, with Amy and her

husband Nick telling the two versions of the story from a first-person perspective. In the form of a diary, Amy presents the reader with a self-image that seems real but is full of purpose. Her diary shows the image of a gentle, submissive and oppressed wife, which makes readers mistake Amy for a woman who has lost herself in the marriage. However, when the narrative enters its second half, Amy suddenly steps in with a fresh perspective of herself, demolish the authenticity of everything in the diary and show how she deftly transforms herself from "being narrated" to "narrating" by manipulating the narrative perspective.

Amy's diary is not only a tool for her self-expression, but also a narrative strategy for her to manipulate the development of the story and guide readers' emotions. By controlling the identity of the narrator, she elevates her own voice as the only credible narrative, and sets the direction of the whole story in her own design. In contrast to traditional novels where female characters are often described as lacking narrative ability and judgment, Amy's dual narrative perspective shows her dominant position in the development of the story. Through the repeated transformation of the identity of the narrator, Amy transforms herself from a "victim" who is looked on and sympathized with to the dominant narrator and the master of events, breaking the definition of her identity by the male characters (Zhao, 2020, pp. 171-172). She not only shows the complex psychology of female characters in the marriage dilemma through self-narration, but also reveals how female characters gain the narrative dominance through strategic actions in the bondage of traditional gender roles through the narration of external actions (Cui, 2015, pp. 137-139).

Centralization of Female Identity

Although Wang Di in the case of *The Case of a Missing Seventeen* "loses her voice" in the story—her voice does not appear directly in the text—she places herself at the center of all narratives through this extreme act of disappearance. When her parents, the police, and the media all try to explain her disappearance, Wang Di's silence becomes the most powerful voice. Through her own disappearance, she makes other people's narratives revolve around her, and any interpretation of her behavior is incomplete, unable to fully understand her true intentions. This kind of sound strategy of "static braking" enables Wang Di to gain the right to challenge and speak to others' narration silently.

But Amy in *Gone Girl* takes a more active attitude and directly grasps the right to shape her own image through the dual narrative perspective. Her diary shows how she is repressed and misunderstood in her marriage relationship, while the second half of her self-narrative reveals her counterattacks and reflections on this dilemma. Amy not only manipulates the development of the story with words, but also challenges the authority of the narrative through the "lies" she spins herself. Her voice not only highlights its complexity and multi-faceted nature, but also successfully breaks the limitation of the traditional female role in passively accepting the narration of others, making her the strongest voice in the narrative (LI, 2020, pp. 229-230).

In the two works, the female characters eventually become the active constructors of the story through the control of the narrative perspective and language. Wang Di directs the focus of the story to herself through "absence", while Amy fully controls the direction of the story through "disguise" and "lie". They not only regain the repressed right to speak through narrative strategy, but also successfully subvert the inherent mode of gender power relationship in traditional mystery novels through the reconstruction of narrative structure. The female

characters in the two novels not only successfully complete the awakening of self-cognition, but also realize the construction and manifestation of their own subjectivity through the control of narrative discourse power.

Results and Discussion

In the case of *The Case of a Missing Seventeen* and *Gone Girl*, the transformation of the female characters' perspectives reflects gradualism and complexity, which profoundly affects the expression of the themes of the works and the readers' understanding of gender relations. Through the act of disappearance, Wang Di gradually changes from the object of "being stared at" to the subject who actively grasps the rhythm of the narrative. Her disappearance is not only a rebellion against the social discipline of patriarchy, but also a new identification of her own identity. Through this secret way of resistance, Wang Di expressed her doubts about traditional gender roles and challenged the established social cognition of her.

In *Gone Girl*, by contrast, Amy is transformed from a passive victim into the leader of the story through an elaborate disappearance. She manipulates the narrative structure to trap both the male characters and the reader in misunderstanding and confusion about their identities. Amy's behavior not only overturns the fixed division of labor of gender roles in the marriage system, but also reflects her deep reflection on the gender power structure. Through self-disappearance and self-reappearance, Amy successfully presents herself as a wise and powerful character, thus challenging traditional gender norms (Wang, 2023, pp. 52-54).

The shifting perspectives of female characters in these two works reflect the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in gender concepts. Wang Di's hidden resistance in the Chinese cultural background shows the suppression and complexity of female self-consciousness in traditional culture; And Amy's direct challenge in the Western culture reveals the strategy and courage of the female role in the process of fighting for equality and autonomy. Although they are faced with different cultural and social environments, both of them have experienced significant changes in the process of fighting for self-identity and right of speech (Chen, 2010, pp. 147-150).

Together, the two works explore the impact of gender power relations on women's subjectivity, revealing the diverse patterns of women's responses to gender inequality. The story of Wang Di and Amy shows women's breakthrough and resistance in the gender power structure, reflecting the necessity and urgency of gender equality consciousness. Through the analysis of these texts, we can have a deeper understanding of how female characters realize self-liberation and subjective expression in different cultural backgrounds. The discussion of this perspective change not only provides a new perspective for promoting the awareness of gender equality, but also lays a foundation for further research on the complexity and diversity of gender relations.

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