

An Analysis of the Law of the Development: From Colonial to Modern American Literature

HOU Xia

Zhoukou Normal University, Zhoukou, China

Although American literature is only a small spray in the long river of history, its rich literary works and literary forms occupy a place in the history of literature. This article attempts to analyze the characteristics of American literature from the colonial period to the modernist period from the perspective of the yin and yang poles and the historical and social background of the United States, further summarizes the inevitable law of its development, and draws the enlightenment for the overall grasp of the history of national literature.

Keywords: yin and yang, American literature, law of development

The pendulum of the hearts of the East and the West is always between abstinence and indulgence, classical and romantic, rational and irrational, etc. Between the two polar opposites, there is a regular oscillation. It tends to be indulgence, romantic and irrational. It can be called the anode; the pole that tends to be abstinent, classical, and rational can be called the cathode... This kind of yin and yang dipole oscillation effect is both diachronic and synchronic. In other words, from a macro perspective look, there is a difference between yin and yang between generations and generations; from a microscopic point of view, there is also a difference between yin and yang in each era (or even a smaller unit of time). (Gu, 2003, p. 49)

Throughout history, the development of American literature also has its yin and yang trend of changes. As a whole, it reflects the development law of the damping oscillation of the cathode-anode-cathode.

Development of American Literature From Colonial to Modern Period

During the American colonial period (1607-1765), Puritanism was promoted. The church took moral cultivation and religious regulations as the yardstick to guide people's daily life and labor. At this time, most of the literary works served religion and politics, praised God, and proclaimed the labor of this life as an atonement. The worldly life is evil, and people hoped to enjoy a happy life in heaven after death. They were too busy to survive and had no time to chant poems, compose music, and cultivate sentiment. Puritanism opposed people reading fictional novels and dramas. Representatives are poets who created religious themes and travel writers who introduced the landscape of the New World. They generally believed that the creation of literary works was to serve God, or to introduce the specific conditions of the New World to relatives, friends, or readers in Europe. The focus of most literary works at that time is to praise God, promote divinity, be little people's desires and personal pursuits, which were in the form of diaries for recording functions and travel notes for communicating information. Therefore, America was "conquest by arms and conquest by the words" (Elliott, 1988, p. 35); its literature was underdeveloped and with little value of literary quality. American

HOU Xia, MA (Associate Professor), College of Foreign Languages, Zhoukou Normal University, Zhoukou, China. Ph.D. Student in Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, major in English Literature.

literature in the colonial period was an imitation of English literature, at the cathode of reason, classicism, and abstinence.

Enlightenment Period

The Enlightenment period (1755 to the end of the 18th century) was a transitional period from cathode to anode in American literature, and it was also a period when North American people fought for independence and found a nation. Due to the economic development and the abundance of people's material life, the colonists no longer trust the goodness of God and atonement and abstinence, and their attention gradually shifted to secular life. Enjoying material life requires a lot of inventions and creations to serve mankind. At that time, the advancement of science led to the birth of Deism. People no longer blindly accepted the preaching of the church, and instead pursued science and reason, summarized the law of development and operation of all things in the world, and believed that this harmonious and exquisite universe was the best proof of the existence of God. In fact, the trend of thought at this time could be called Neoclassicism, advocating the form of perfect order, clear awareness, restraint, and practicality. Doctrine is also a major feature. Under the influence of philosophical thoughts such as the European Enlightenment and Deism, the role of God was greatly weakened, and Puritanism gradually declined. As a representative of this period, Franklin was not only a great scientist, politician, educator, but also a literary writer. He did not forget to praise God when he created his literary works, and his work at this time was not like Puritanism. The atonement was to obtain success and happiness in life. The world has changed from being full of pain and suffering to being filled with joy and happiness. Although it was still at the negative stage during this period, its degree was relieved. It is on the road of positive progress, from worshiping God to the pursuit of earthly life. The most decent respect for God is to be kind to people. During the subsequent War of Independence, literature was dominated by rational essays; mainly the fact that various political forces had heated debates on major issues such as the importance of the revolution, the future and direction of the revolution, and the form and nature of the government. Essays, political essays and speeches were full of combat effectiveness and persuasiveness. Although this period was still dominated by reason, the dominant position of God in people's ideology and literary works has been weakened. People have begun to pursue the pursuit of secular life, people's desire has increased, and social vitality has increased significantly. American literature at that time gradually changed from the cathode to the anode.

Romantic Period

During the Romantic Period (1800-1865), the American economy enjoyed great prosperity. Thanks to the independence of the new country and the freedom from British colonial rule, the material life was greatly improved and people were required to pursue more enjoyment of life. It further requires the diversification of literary works to satisfy people's spiritual enjoyment. National literature began to prosper in an all-round way, breaking the British monopoly, emphasizing the imagination and emotional color of literature, opposing the classical views of reason, order, and temperance, and praising nature advocates the thoughts and feelings of individuals and ordinary people. Politically, due to the democratic line promoted by President Jackson, the atmosphere of democracy has skyrocketed. With the development of industry and the opening of the western frontier, the United States has begun to become a confident, prosperous country. Literature is no longer a tool for religion and politics, but a means for writers to express their personal minds and discuss human nature, man and nature, science and progress, and other philosophical issues. The creative form imitates British romanticism,

but the material is entirely taken from American reality. For example, the Westward Movement was related to the social life at that time. The expansion of the frontier has provided Americans with a broad imagination. As long as the western land has not been reclaimed, there is always hope of success in getting rich. They also praised the American landscape and eulogized American life, reflecting the optimism and enthusiasm of the American people. Romanticism at this time opposed rationality, scientific tradition, and pursued enjoyment, fantasy, emotional and psychological pleasure, as well as supernatural, with positive characteristics. In particular, Transcendentalism has completely got rid of the basic ideas of Christianity. Then the creation of poetry during the Romantic period marked the peak of American literature. "The birth of free verse broke through the limitations of traditional poetry forms" (Tao, 2011, p. 60). The content involves all aspects of life, praises ordinary people, and emphasizes the unity of spirit and body. Spirit and body are equally important. These ideas were unprecedented in the era of Puritanism, especially when Christianity controls and suppresses human desires. It is impossible for people to focus on the secular life and satisfy the fleshly pursuit of emotion and rights. According to Christianity, the flesh is sinful, dirty, and can be discarded. However, the writers of the Romantic period, especially the poets, opposed such imprisoned thoughts and proposed diametrically opposite trends, heralding the arrival of romantic, irrational, lustful, and socially vigorous positive literature.

Realistic Period

However, the former period of American literature was at the anode for more than half a century, and then Realism (1865-1918) literature entered the stage of history. From the Civil War to the outbreak of World War I, the United States completed the transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial society. The appearance and economic life began to undergo rapid changes. Railway construction, resource development, and cheap labor brought by immigration all promoted the development of industry. Big factories and big cities have sprung up, new technologies and new machinery were constantly emerging, and there was a scene of vigorous development everywhere, but industrialization has brought labor disputes and created capitalists who relied on exploitation to get rich. The disparity between the rich and the poor was more and more serious, and strikes have occurred from time to time. Another consequence of industrialization, there was increasingly corrupt politics, and political scandals. All these changes and understandings forced people to discover new life and newly developed land. So the Local Colorism literature appeared after the Civil War. Writers in this period no longer explored the mystery of life and death or sing heroes; nor were they satisfied with rational and passionate romanticism. They focused on real life, showed life, and criticized the dark side of life, so the anode declined and tended to be rational. However, this situation fell back to the cathode at the end of the 19th century, social vitality declined significantly, and people were pessimistic and worried. American monopoly capital was gradually formed at this time. Domestic contradictions were intensified, and the inequality between the rich and the poor became more prominent. The literary works of this period are famous as naturalist writers. They viewed things from the perspective of pessimistic fatalism, believed that people are dominated by environmental and genetic factors, and could not control their own destiny. They are more radical than realist writers, describing the miserable lives of the people at the bottom. In the American society where the weak and the strong are, the working people are unable to overcome their own disadvantages and social oppression. The writers believe that there are no moral principles in the world, no will, and religion is absurd. American literature at this time has reduced fantasy, romance, enthusiasm, and praise of ordinary people, and tends to look at life rationally during the transition period, find social contradictions, and criticize social problems until

the decline of the cathode. The principle of survival of the person, its own shortcomings, and social pressure will bring about the demise of some people, and people cannot resist the arrangement of fate. At this time, the pessimism, the loss of hope, and the lack of social vitality are the manifestations of cathode literature.

Modern Period

After World War I until the end of World War II in 1945, American literature continued to slide towards the lower end of the cathode. The First World War had a great impact on the thinking and spiritual outlook of the American people. People's belief in freedom and democracy began to waver, and they generally felt confused and even desperate. They no longer pinned their hopes on the future, but emphasized "to seize the day and have fun in time". Although there was a temporary economic boom after the war, the stock market crash in 1929 caused an economic depression that lasted for 10 years. The U.S. economy has just begun to pick up, and the shadow of World War II has begun to hang over the land. The 10-year economic depression and the spiritual crisis caused by World War II have made the tone of American literature in this period even more low and pessimistic. People began to reflect on themselves in pessimism and disappointment, and viewed the United States and the American social system in a critical light. Like Eliot's poem titled "The Waste Land", American society, including people's spiritual world, is dead and shattered. The confused generation describes wars that crush people's ideals and lives, and traumatize their hearts. Left-wing literature exposes the social problems brought about by the capitalist system. Southern authors describe the decline of their homes and the clash of civilizations. Many writers portray images of heavy historical burdens and the shackles of traditional social customs. They cannot face real life. Black culture portrays the double oppression of race and class. The American literature at this time fell to the peak of the cathode.

Conclusion

In short, the sensitivity of American writers to the influence of life and thought at the time may be unique in the history of world literature except Russian literature. European critics are safe in a long and fixed historical and literary tradition, and they often complain about the United States. There is a lack of pure literature, but in a country like the United States, it is difficult for writers to ignore the huge social forces that are changing the society around them, and focus on cultivating the beauty of pure literature. Therefore, most American writers are excited to devote themselves to the creation of new countries. To realize their democratic ideas, this kind of creation itself is more attractive than any traditional literary theme. American literature is the product of social history, and the alternation of yin and yang indicates that literature is also everything. One of all things, a part of the universe. There are laws of origin, development, rise, decline, decline, and even death. Hegel once said that the final outcome of literature is to be replaced by philosophy. Perhaps in the future, American literature will eventually disappear after many changes in the cathode and anode. In summary, in addition to the characteristics of rationality, abstinence, and classicism, the characteristics of the cathode should be accompanied by the characteristics of depression, pessimism, world-weariness, fatalism, and lack of vitality in society. On the contrary, in addition to irrationality, romance, and indulgence, the yang pole should also be determined, positive, energetic, energetic, and hopeful. This also indicates that literature, like human beings, has experienced weakness in birth and childhood, prosper in adulthood, and decline in old age. The characteristics of contemporary literature in American literature need to be further studied in the future.

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