

The Madwoman in *Miss Sophia's Diary*

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Abstract: In *Miss Sophia's Diary*, Ding Ling has created a full and three-dimensional character of Sophia, who experienced multiple psychological struggles and exhibited the characteristics of "madness". Foucault, Gilbert, and Gubar have explained that "madness" often has complex aesthetic connotations and metaphorical meanings in modern literary contexts. This paper uses feminist and psychoanalytic theories to analyze Sophia's "madness", exploring the social roots and spiritual roots of her madness, as well as the way to eliminate it, namely, the oppression of the patriarchal society, the conflict between the spirit and the flesh, and writing diaries.

Keywords: *Miss Sophia's Diary*; Madness; Feminism; Psychoanalysis; Modern Chinese Literature

1. Introduction

Miss Sophia's Diary is a masterpiece by Ding Ling, which tells the story of a torturous love affair in the form of a diary kept by Sophia, a 20-year-old university student. In 1927, Ding Ling published this novel, which is considered to have "dropped a bomb on the society", symbolizing the liberation, freedom, and individuality brought about by the May Fourth Movement. Moreover, through the image of Sophia, Ding Ling also has released a "madwoman" who overturned the traditional image of women.

In the modern literary context, "madness" is not in the physiological sense but the form of paranoia and fantasy, to express the anger and depression in reality through the unusual behavior and mental state of madmen and maximize the liberation of the soul and body. "I'm delirious" (Ding 59), Sophia writes several times in her diary. "I can't control the surges of madness" (Ding 78). She also reveals her desires to commit suicide and murder, all of which are evidence of her "madness".

In the text, madness often has complex aesthetic connotations and metaphorical meanings. For Michel Foucault, Madness is the product of the social and cultural conditions that create and define it, rather than a natural phenomenon that various societies respond to differently. The author attempts to explore the social roots, spiritual roots of Sophia's "madness" and the way to eliminate it through feminist and psychoanalytic theories in the pages that follow.

2. The Madwoman in the Conflict between Male-dominated Society and Female Consciousness

In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar offer a feminist interpretation of female madness: "...because a woman is denied the autonomy-the subjectivity-that the pen represents, she is not only excluded from culture, but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent Otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing" (Gilbert and Gubar 19). In other words, female madness results from the loss of subjectivity due to oppression by the male-dominated society.

Sophia is in a cruel society that requires women to be timid and submissive. Therefore, Sophia's "madness" expresses female emotions and desires. When she first met Ling Jishi, she fell in love with his beauty and longed to possess him. But Sophia's lust was suppressed by another force: "I know very well that in this society I'm forbidden to take what I need to gratify my desires and frustrations, even when it clearly wouldn't hurt anybody" (Ding 55).

Sophia was disgusted by Yunlin and Yufang's "platonic love" and ridiculed them as "ascetics", who also mocked her for being too childish, which represents the feedback to Sophia from the outside world. A woman's erotic desire should have been the beginning of her understanding of the world and

self-confirmation. However, Sophia's erotic desire became the trigger for her self-doubt and even madness without positive feedback. She condemned herself as soon as she became lustful: "A woman that uninhibited would risk having everything blow up in her face. I still want people to respect me" (Ding 57). Male-dominated society has taught women that "to experience her education in docility, submissiveness, self-lessness as in some sense sickening. To be trained in renunciation is almost necessary to be trained to ill health since the human animal's first and strongest urge is to his/her survival, pleasure, assertion" (Gilbert and Gubar 54). In the conflict between the precepts of a male-dominated society and a strong self-awareness, Sophia fell into erratic emotions and presented "madness".

Lust also triggered her rebellion and her pursuit of self-awareness, forcing her to struggle with "madness". The feudal rituals shackled Chinese women firmly and permanently. However, with the rise of the May Fourth Movement, modern western thought poured in, and the repressed female consciousness emerged from the ground like a volcanic eruption. In this social environment, Sophia deconstructs the image of a meek and submissive woman under traditional norms. It reconstructs the path of a new woman who derives pleasure from gender relations.

3. The Madwoman in the Conflict between Soul and Body

Before she learned that an inferior soul was living in the noble beauty of Ling Jishi, Sophia's "madness" was due to her female consciousness. However, after realizing the truth from the subsequent communication, her "madness" turned out to be the result of "the contradiction between soul and body", an irreconcilable state of what Freud called the "ego" and "superego".

Ding Ling shows us the inner world of a woman who is utterly crazy about male appearance in detail. Sophia was so obsessed with Ling Jishi that she fantasized: "I subjected him to the most searching scrutiny. I was possessed with a desire to mark every part of his body with my lips." (Ding 57) The mental activity reveals Sophia's ego, driven by sexual instincts and the pursuit of maximum pleasure.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, Sophia is a person who seeks mutual understanding, sincere feelings, and spiritual communication between people, which constitutes her superego binding itself to society's moral code. Therefore, although she was hungry for love, she still said: "If he doesn't understand me and my needs, then what good are love and empathy?" (Ding 52) It is clear from this confession that Sophia puts "understanding" above "love" and "empathy". However, neither Lin Jishi, the handsome but despicable one, nor Weidi, the kind but simple-minded one, can understand Sophia. Weidi only had childlike behavior, while Lin Jishi desired Sophia's body.

Sophia went crazy in the contradiction between her ego and superego, as Foucault said: "Love disappointed in its excess, and especially love deceived by the fatality of death, has no other recourse but madness" (Foucault 30). When the ego prevailed, she can even think excitedly, "Hah! Sophia has a lover..." (Ding 77) But when the superego prevailed, self-esteem overcame the desire: "I should have told one of the vilest beasts on the face of the earth to leave me the hell alone." (Ding 80) As Sophia became more and more insane, the ego drove her to accept Ling Jishi's kiss. But the result was that she had contempt for herself and felt disappointed and disgusted rather than happy and satisfied, as the superego completed its final rebellion. In this process, the superego won the final victory.

The conflict between soul and body, sense and sensibility, ego and superego tortured Sophia a lot, making the madness just the outlet for her to free herself from this violent self-struggle.

4. The Madwoman Resorting to Writing

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar begin with the question, "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?" (Gilbert and Gubar 3) The author suggests that writers' pen is just like male penis, making what they write show the authority of a male-dominated society. When the pen falls into the hands of women, it becomes their weapon to escape from the prison of patriarchal law.

In the novel, Sophia confided her recent dilemma to Yufang, hoping for some comfort, but instead, Yufang lectured her for being too dishonest. Thus, the idea of writing came to her: "I should make myself good with either a pen or a gun even if its purpose is just my vanity or to win the praise of some shallow audience" (Ding 73). According to the previous discussion, Yufang's response generally represents the society's feedback to Sophia. After receiving negative feedback from society, Sophia

chooses to resort to madness in writing. In this confession, she also compared the “pen” to the “gun” as a weapon.

The author, Ding Ling, also used her pen and words to initiate a subversion and rebellion against a male-dominated society. Her writing is a diary in complete contrast to the masculine grand narrative, and the content is a personal experience compared to the historical narrative. She interpreted the world with female emotional experience, reflected the life at that time with female subjectivity, and even created a “madwoman” to subvert the angelic virtuous lady in the male discourse.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, writing is a cultural activity that leads the primitive sexual impulse to socially sanctioned noble acts. Writing allows Sophia not to “just sit vacantly by myself and wait for time to pass” (Ding 50). She used words to analyze her divided self, explore the collision between soul and body, and achieve self-improvement through journal writing.

Similarly, for Ding Ling, who was alone in Beijing at that time, the low tide of the revolution and the obstacles to establishing the school all caused her to fall into sorrow and loneliness, like Sophia. She was dissatisfied with society but had no way out for her life, had a lot to say but could not find anyone to talk to, and wanted to do something but could not find the opportunity. So she used a pen to express her lonely struggle and relieve the wandering in the darkness. “In a certain sense, turn silent loneliness into vocal loneliness, and make loneliness change from nothingness to existence” (Dai and Meng 146). Ding Ling has realized the exploration and elevation of self-spirit.

5. Conclusion

In the literary context, “madness” is not an end but a form of struggle. Traditional male-dominated society puts the shackles of “modesty” on women, so Sophia had to use “madness” to break free from the shackles and build her female self-consciousness. Civilized society inevitably brings about the suppression of sexual instincts, and Sophia used “madness” to release her ego and call on her superego. Nevertheless, she was also looking for an outlet for her “madness”, making writing the common anchor for her and Ding Ling’s spirits. The pens in their hands are a weapon that directly strikes the male-dominated society and is a reagent for experimenting with psychoanalytic theories.

References

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