

A Study of Lin Yutang's Humorous Discourse

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Abstract: *Humor is a hallmark feature of Lin Yutang's literary creations. This paper analyzes Lin Yutang's use of humor to criticize social reality, portray characters, and import new expressions into English in *Moment in Peking*. In addition, the paper also discusses his humorous language from a rhetorical perspective. Mr. Lin Yutang's full use of humor in his works reflects the literary talent and style of a master humorist, prompting people to value the function of humor in literary creation.*

Keywords: *Humor; Lin Yutang; Language function; Rhetoric*

1. Introduction

When it comes to modern Chinese humor writers, Lin Yutang is definitely mentioned. He interpreted and applied humor in his own life experience and literary creation. According to Lin Yutang, humor is characterized by "teasing but not abusing", and should be "with a little bit of my Buddha's compassionate thoughts", and "humor is just a kind of calm and easy-going attitude". He was not only the first person to introduce the concept of humor into China, introducing and publicizing humor in theory, but also practicing it in his creations. In the 1920s and 1930s, Lin Yutang introduced the concept of humor into China. Lin Yutang translated the Western word "Humour" into "Humor", which had a great impact on the literary and artistic circles, and was considered the first advocate of "Humor" in China, and thus gained the title of "Master of Humor". He is regarded as the first advocate of humor in China, and has thus earned the nickname "Master of Humor".

2. Lin Yutang's concept of humor

In the comparison of Chinese and Western cultures, Lin Yutang was deeply impressed by the inadequacy of Chinese literature. *"Because modern Western culture has a natural and lively outlook on life, and was liberated by the romantic trend of the nineteenth century, modern Western culture is more tolerant and more sympathetic. Although the new culture in China has been advocated, it has not been refined by decades of romantic trends. The human mind is still bitter and the human thought is still dry."*^[1] It can be seen that Lin Yutang's original intention of advocating "humor" in China was to develop Chinese culture from the classical rigidity to the modern "natural and lively" direction.

Through the study of Western humor theory and the discovery of Chinese humor culture tradition, Lin Yutang realized that humor, as an aesthetic category, is essentially the same in both China and the West. Through his research, he found the intersection of Chinese and Western humor theories and expounded many of his own views on humor, thus constructing a more complete humor theory system. Concerning the connotation of humor, Lin Yutang pointed out three characteristics of humor: (1) Humor is a "heartfelt smile" and expresses "the glory of the heart and the richness of wisdom." In "Smile from the Heart", he says: "The word 'humor' is so humorous that people often do not understand it, but I think the explanation of 'smile from the heart' is very appropriate and easy to understand." In "On Humor", he also said, *"The best humor is naturally that which expresses the light of the heart and the richness of wisdom", and this "light of the heart" should be "a gentle transcendence while at the same time Add the idea of compassion", so it is often "laughter with tears, tears with laughter."* (2) Humor is expressed in the article as "light and natural", "light and comfortable", between the bold and elegant. (3) Humor is very similar to satire, but it does not aim at satire, and it can only become the humor of lightness and nature by removing the sourness and fire in satire.^[2]

Lin Yutang believes that there are broad and narrow meanings of humor, the broad meaning of humor includes all the words that make people laugh, even vulgar jokes, while the narrow meaning of humor is differentiated from wit, ridicule, and sarcasm^[1]. The view of humor advocated by Lin Yutang is in its narrower sense. For Lin Yutang, humor is a product of wisdom, he said: that the wisdom of

man has been enlightened, to deal with a variety of problems outside, and there is still room for humor, so there is humor^[1]. At the same time, humor is an attitude, an outlook on life, contains unique insights and observations on life, so there is a considerable outlook on life, penetrate the reasoning, speak close to the heart of the people, only then will be able to write a work of humor^[1]. In the time when Lin Yutang lived, the power of Taoism was very strong, restricting people's thinking, speech, and action, resulting in the status quo that people only spoke in facade language and did not speak close to their feelings. Mr. Lin was deeply touched by this, and introduced humor as a good medicine to cure this kind of stubborn disease, thus elevating humor to the high level of culture and ideology: no matter which country's culture, life, literature, and ideology can be nourished with close-to-sentiment humor. The culture, life, literature, and thoughts of any country can be nourished by humor. Without humor to nourish the nation, its culture will become more and more hypocritical, its life will become more and more fraudulent, its thoughts will become more and more corrupt, its literature will become more and more dry, and its human mind will become more and more stubborn^[1].

Humor is an intermediary, a "medicine" extracted by Lin Yutang from Western culture to heal the sick and weak character of the nation, in order to achieve the social change of "Europeanized China and Europeanized Chinese people"^[3]. Lin Yutang's strong advocacy of "humor" and his physical practice of literary creation also led to his break with Lu Xun from an acquaintance to a rupture, which led to fierce criticisms from left-wing writers. In recent years, with the lifting of the political ban, academics have begun to hear about Lin Yutang's "humor" on a cultural level, and Shi Jianwei^[4] has clearly pointed out that Lin Yutang's "humor" is "one of a series of fusion changes caused by the great collision of Chinese and Western cultures in the 20th century. Shi states clearly that Lin Yutang's "humor" is "one of a series of fusion caused by the great collision of Chinese and Western cultures in the 20th century."^[5]

3. Functions of Lin Yutang's Humorous Language

3.1. Reality of Humor - Criticism of Social Reality

All can't do anything and that's why all want to be officials.^[6]

Any work is a product of its time. "Moment in Peking" published in 1938, was written from the Boxer Rebellion until the early stages of the Anti-Japanese War, a history that involved the final reign of the corrupt Qing government, the invasion of the Eight-Power Allied Forces, the Boxer Rebellion, followed by the National Revolution that abolished the imperial system, the melee of the warlords, the reign of the warlords after the Nationalist Party came to power, and the invasion of Japan.

In his works, Lin Yutang made bitter satire on officials, warlords, and wars, enhancing the relevance of his works. What a sharp criticism of the posturing, self-righteous palace bureaucrats who oppress the people. Succinct and powerful, it hits the nail on the head and makes people laugh and think at the same time.

They are fighting for a carcass which is Peking. Peking is still the seat of the "central government" and the man controlling it can have, when he is dead, an extra four or eight words in his list of titles as enumerated in his funeral notice. There is a little extra revenue, of course, too. But not much besides. It is chiefly a war over the length of their respective funeral notices, to see which dead man shall have a longer smile from his coffin when he hears his honors being read.^[6]

Lin Yutang compares Beijing to a "dead body," where warlords fight to the death, only to die with a few more words on the official street, and only to laugh a little longer in their coffins when they hear their official titles read out. These remarks expose the boring nature of warlordism, not only mocking the warlords but also powerfully contrasting the author's advocacy of Taoism in his works, reflecting Lin Yutang's profound insights and transcendental understanding of life.

"Those bullets from foreign rifles don't recognize persons, Pengteng! It goes through your brain cap and you are already a corpse with a crooked queue."^[6]

It goes through your brain-cap and you are already a corpse with a crooked queue.

3.2 Creativity of Humor - Inputting New Expressions

It is like a moth flapping its wings against a lamp--suicide.^[6]

Heteroglossia is a form of language unique to Chinese, often with a humorous effect. This kind of utterance imports a new and interesting form of language for English.

3.3 Literary nature of humor - characterization

Mulan, seeing that her mother was about to shed tears again, said gaily, "And in your letters tell us if there's really a country called the Kingdom of Grape Teeth," which is the Chinese meaning of the name Portugal. "I heard that the Empress Dowager did not believe there was a country by such a funny name, and when the Portuguese Minister was about to be presented to her for the first time, she said that people must have been fooling her. 'How can there be a country called Grape Teeth?' she said. 'If so, there must be also a Kingdom of Bean Teeth and a Kingdom of Bamboo Teeth.'^[6]

Cassia was rather tall, with a good head and neck, the line of her body gradually flowing out until below the waist it tapered in, with the round, carefully balanced trousers, and ending at the two small tips of the slightly upturned shoes—like a perfectly proportioned vase that one can examine for days and feel its perfection without being able to tell why it is perfect.^[6]

4. The Rhetoric of Lin Yutang's Humor

In Lin Yutang's prose, it is the author's skillful and appropriate use of rhetoric that lays the foundation for the relaxed, natural, and humorous style that characterizes Lin Yutang's prose.

4.1 Specific and precise figures

Mr. Lin Yutang's prose is relaxed and natural, and he talks about it in a lively manner. People are often infected by his solemn and meticulous language, and unconsciously feel the life and life with him. The use of fine is an important factor in the formation of his style of humor, which is both solemn and harmonious, unhurried and unhurried. Delicacy means deliberately breaking the rules and consciously using specific and precise figures to calculate things that are usually difficult or unnecessary to calculate.^[7] Precise calculation brings about a sense of solemnity and truthfulness; while excessive finesse exudes a humorous and witty tone. "Fine" can convey people's special feelings about objective things through unusually precise numbers, giving a sense of truth and humor.

As pure ventures in pseudo-scientific formulations, we may proceed to analyze national characters in the following manner..Let "R" stand for a sense of reality (or realism), "D" for dreams(or idealism), "H" for a sense of humor..we may put it thus: "3 grains of Realism, 2 grains of dreams, 2 grains of Humor and 1 grain of Sensitivity make an Englishman."^[8]

4.2 Simile

Mr. Lin Yutang is good at using metaphor and hyperbole to capture the characteristics of the object and enhance its expression, thus producing a vivid and witty effect.

If the joker is often cruel in disillusioning the idealist, he nevertheless performs a very important function right there by not letting the Idealist bump his head against the stone wall of reality and receive a ruder shock.^[7]

Reading the essays in the modern language, where the classical language had been the rule, was at first like seeing peasant bridegrooms invade a ladies' salon to claim their bride-uncouth, unmannered, horrifying, or direct, amusing, and satisfying, according to the onlookers.^[7]

This example is a comparison between the literary language and the vernacular language because the vernacular language is vulgar and the literary language is elegant. Therefore, when one reads the vernacular language for the first time, it is almost like watching a groom from the countryside break into a noblewoman's salon to rob her of her bride; some people find it vulgar, impolite, and scary, while others find it direct, interesting and practical. What a marvelous, raw, young, and interesting metaphor this is.

4.3 Contradiction

In his prose, it is inevitable to use the rhetorical device of contradiction to express contradictory phenomena and contradictory emotions. Contradiction is a rhetorical way to strengthen the effect of

expression by intentionally using self-contradictory words in a specific language environment for the sake of expression. The objective basis of paradoxical rhetoric is the contradictory dialectical relationship that exists in the deeper layers of objective things, which is used to describe some complex features and attributes of things or people, and attracts the curiosity of readers, with concise language and subtle humor.

The Chinese philosopher is one who dreams with one eye open, who views life with love and sweet irony, who mixes his cynicism with a kindly tolerance, and who alternately wakes up from life's dream and then nods again, feeling more alive when he is dreaming than when he is awake, thereby investing his waking life with a dream-world quality.^[7]

Lin Yutang uses contradictory phrases such as "selfishness and loving tolerance", and "the man who feels more alive in his dreams than in his waking life", and thus also contains dreams in his waking life, to elucidate his own view of the many faces of philosophers in a dialectical way, which is philosophical, and the language is concise and humorous.

In modern life, a philosopher is about the most honored and most unmotivated person in the world, if indeed such a person exists.^[7]

Lin Yutang first used the positive "the most respected" and then the negative "the most unnoticed guy" to write about the world's contradictory attitudes towards philosophers, so that people in unexpected experience the language subtle and humorous.

4.4 Borrowing Words

Lin Yutang's prose is strange in its simplicity, not only plain and solemn but also lively, and the borrowing of words is one of the important aspects that produce marvelous vividness. Borrowing is a kind of rhetoric that utilizes the context to break through the conventional method of words and skillfully combines and matches words with different categories of use.

This is a personal testimony, a testimony of my own experience of thought and life.^[7]

In this case, "testimony" is usually used in the context of an interrogation, but the author uses it in the context of writing with humility and humor.

Coupled with his straightforward self-assertive manner, this type of handshaking practically seems to say...^[7]

"Style" is generally used in clothing, but here it is borrowed to refer to the posture of a handshake, an unusual use of the word that makes the language humorous.

The unusual usage makes the language humorous and interesting.

5. Conclusion

Lin Yutang said in the article "On Humor"^[9]: *"Humor is just a calm and faraway bystander, often with tears in laughter and laughter in tears. The text is light and natural, not like the funny show of the strange fight, not like the Yu tick out of the police clever argument, the humor of the article in the elegant and bold between the natural, without pretense."* It can be seen that the good use of rhetoric is the key to the humor and attractiveness of his articles. Lin Yutang pursued natural harmony and relaxed humor. Humor has different realms and various means of expression. According to the object and attitude of writing, writers can use different means of humor, to portray characters, criticize the current situation, or express their opinions, and views on life and the world. Lin Yutang deserves to be a master of literature as well as a master of language.

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