

On the Artistic Features of Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian

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Abstract: *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian* is a renowned poem by the Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu. Highly esteemed through the ages, it holds a significant place in the history of Chinese literature. This poem employs a unique narrative style and a rich array of expressive techniques, showcasing the poet's profound and sincere emotions. It creates a melancholic poetic atmosphere, with a fluctuating plot that profoundly impacts the reader. It epitomizes the essence of "somber and forceful" style, conveying deep and complex ideological connotations, making it a treasure of classical Chinese poetry. This paper analyzes the artistic features of the poem from the perspectives of narrative characteristics, poetic style, and the integration of emotion and ambition.

Keywords: *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian*, narrative, somber and forceful, emotion and ambition

1. Introduction

Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian was written during a transitional period in the Tang Dynasty, from prosperity to decline. It is a great realist poem by Du Fu. Exploring the artistic features of this poem is essential for understanding Du Fu's creative mindset, his methods, and the development trajectory of his poetry within the historical context. This paper delves into the poem's artistic features from the aspects of narrative characteristics, poetic style, and the fusion of emotion and ambition.

2. Narrative Characteristics

2.1. First-Person Perspective

In *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian*, the author uses a first-person narrative, focusing on the narrator's experiences. The poem recounts the poet's journey back to Fengxian County to visit his family, passing through Mount Li, where he reflects on the emperor and Yang Guifei indulging in pleasure at Huaqing Palace with their ministers, while the people suffer great hardships. Upon returning home, he finds his young son starved to death, causing him immense grief, which he expresses in the poem. The detailed portrayal of his observations, experiences, and emotions during the long journey confines the narrative to the poet's scope of

observation and understanding, and the emotions conveyed are his genuine feelings at that time. This method allows the reader to immerse themselves in the poet's real travel memories and experiences, using realist techniques to recreate the situation.

By employing the first-person perspective, the author can better express personal emotions and opinions, giving the entire poem a blend of narrative and commentary. In the poem, pure narrative is rare; most of the narration is intertwined with emotion and commentary. For instance, the lines "What shamed me was my role as a father, lack of food had caused this infant's death." seem both narrative and emotional [1]. This integration of narrative, emotion, and commentary helps the reader better understand the scene and the poet's feelings, presenting the social reality of the time vividly before the reader.

2.2. Combination of Imagery and Allusions

Imagery is "a form that embodies subjective emotions"[2], which reflects the poet's feelings. In *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian*, the author employs a wealth of imagery, enriching the poem's visual appeal and enhancing emotional expression. For example, when depicting the life of the emperor and ministers, he uses imagery like "fairy-like beauties," "sable fur coats," "camel-hoof stew," "frosty oranges," and "sweet tangerines" to vividly bring to life their luxurious and indulgent lifestyle. Conversely, when describing the life of the common people and his travel observations, he uses imagery such as "cold sky," "frozen bones," and "wind and snow" to depict the hardships of the common folk, forming a stark contrast with the opulence of the emperor and ministers, thus expressing his discontent with their extravagant lifestyle and his compassion for the people's suffering.

In *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian*, the author also extensively uses allusions. "An allusion is an image or a group of images that are not explicitly present in the text but are embedded in the culture outside the text"[2]. Du Fu excels at using allusions, as Qiu Zhanyao praised, saying the allusions in Du Fu's poems are like "adding salt to water; you only taste the salt when you drink the water" ("水中着盐,饮水乃知盐味。") [3]. In this poem, the author frequently employs allusions to convey emotions and viewpoints. For example, "I secretly likened myself to Hou Ji and Xie." refers to the virtuous ministers of Emperor Shun, expressing Du Fu's aspiration and his hope for a wise ruler like Emperor Shun. In his poem *A Gift to Vice Minister Wei*, Du Fu also wrote: "To assist the ruler to the level of Yao and Shun, and again make the customs pure." ("致君尧舜上,再使风俗淳。") This expresses similar sentiments; he yearns to assist the monarch, transforming him into a wise ruler like Yao and Shun, and thereby making social customs pure and the government harmonious. Another example is: "All within the households of Wei and Huo," ("尽在卫霍室") referring to the relatives of Emperor Wu of Han, Wei Qing and Huo Qubing, as a metaphor for the Yang family. Through the use of allusion, Du Fu subtly points out the political crisis and the emperor's incompetence. His expression is subtle, conveying loyalty to the ruler while also hinting at criticisms that could not be openly discussed.

The use of imagery and allusions effectively portrays broad and profound social phenomena and conveys complex and deep ideological content within a short space. This poem expresses compassion for the fragmented country and the suffering people, self-reflection on personal circumstances, personal ambition, heartfelt expressions of longing for home and relatives, and concerns for the nation's future, all rich and intense in both content and emotion.

Moreover, by organically combining various images, Du Fu constructs a vivid narrative scene that creates a strong visual impact, immersing the reader in the historical context and vividly depicting social realities unrecorded in historical texts, one of the reasons Du Fu's poetry is considered "poetic history."

2.3. Dual Contrast of Characters

In *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian*, the author creates many contrasting character images, highlighting the deep social contradictions and the living conditions of people from different social strata.

Firstly, there is a contrast between commoners and the powerful. "Duling you buyi." ("杜陵有布衣") refers to the poet himself as an ordinary person, contrasting sharply with the powerful officials. Through his own experiences and his family's tragic fate, such as "Year in year out, I stay worried about common folks." ("穷年忧黎元") and "my young son had died of hunger," ("幼子饿已卒") he profoundly expresses his own hardships and his sympathy and concern for the lives of the lower class. In contrast, the lines "Emperor and officials are indulged in pleasures." ("君臣留欢娱") to "Chilled oranges are placed on top of delicious tangerines." ("霜橙压香橘") highlight the indulgence of the emperor and his ministers in Mount Li, depicting their lavish lifestyle. Especially the line "Appetizing smells of wine and meat come through doors of the rich, while frozen bones by roadsides are left unburied." ("朱门酒肉臭,路有冻死骨") starkly contrasts the wealth disparity and injustice in society, vividly revealing social contradictions and oppositions.

Du Fu also expresses his ideal and aspirations in the poem, as seen in the line "So foolish in what I swore to become! —I secretly likened myself to Hou Ji and Xie." ("许身一何愚,窃比稷与契") where he likens himself to the virtuous ministers Jike and Qi, showing his political ideals and ambitions. However, his real-life experiences are "I remain that way until now, and I have toughed it out to live in obscurity." ("兀兀遂至今,忍为尘埃没") reflecting the vast gap between his ideals and reality. "I muse over individuals who have lost their means of livelihood, and worry about soldiers guarding faraway outposts." ("默思失业徒,因念远戍卒") Despite his concern for national affairs and the people's suffering, he can only live in harsh natural conditions, "Year-end is near; all vegetation withers, and gusts threaten to shatter high ridges" ("岁暮百草零,疾风高冈裂") leading a lowly and arduous life.

Through such contrasts, Du Fu profoundly reveals the wealth disparity, the folly of the emperor and ministers, reflecting the complexity and diversity of society. These contrasts not only demonstrate Du Fu's deep humanistic concern but also reflect his profound insight and critical spirit towards social reality.

3. The Style of Somber and Forceful

The Qing Dynasty scholar Yang Lun praised *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian*, saying, "The predecessors' ancient-style poems were mostly honest and far-reaching. Du Fu's work stands out for its somber and forceful style, often with long pieces, creating a new path in poetry. Not a single line follows the Han and Wei style, deeply capturing the essence"[4]. ("五古前人多质厚而清远,少陵出而沉郁顿挫,每多大篇,逐为诗道另辟一门径。无一语蹈袭汉魏,正深得其神理。") Wu Zhantai explained the definition of somber and forceful: "Somber refers to the content, forceful refers to the form"[5]. ("沉郁者,意也,顿挫者,法也。") Somber and forceful" in poetry refers to a profound, solemn, and expansive emotional depth, coupled with a style that expresses these emotions with dramatic intensity and variation. Together, these elements create a deeply resonant and weighty artistic realm and emotional world.

Firstly, the somber and forceful style is evident in the genuine emotions infused into the creation process. *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian* while recounting the poet's return home, does not merely describe his observations along the way. Even the

smallest details he notices, such as "all plants wither" and "howling," evoke the poet's infinite emotions and genuine feelings.

Secondly, the somber and forceful style manifests in the poem's emotional gravitas, grandiosity, and depth. In Du Fu's *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian*, the detailed depiction of the journey creates a desolate and somber atmosphere. Upon reaching home, instead of the expected warmth, the scene becomes even more tragic. Describing the family's misery and poverty, such as "My wife is living in a different county, and I'm separated from ten mouths in family by snowstorm. " and "I hear wailing in stepping into the door, and realize a young son has died from hunger. " (“老妻寄异县,十口隔风雪”“入门闻号啕,幼子饥已卒”) the poem's emotional tone becomes increasingly poignant. Despite personal misfortunes, the poet's thoughts transcend personal suffering, extending to the plight of the populace, reflecting a grand social vision that encompasses both national concern and people's suffering.

4. Integration of Emotion and Ambition

The concept of "emotional and ambitious unity" refers to the poet's fusion of personal emotions, aspirations, and social concerns. On his journey from the capital to Fengxian, Du Fu deeply felt the people's suffering and the court's corruption, generating strong emotions. When passing Mount Li, he vividly describes the luxurious life of the emperor and ministers. Faced with the court's pervasive indulgence and the relatives' arrogance, he laments, expressing his political ambition and concern for the state of affairs, also serving a critical function.

5. Conclusion

Du Fu wrote *Venting Feelings with 500 Words in Going from Capital to County Fengxian* during a transitional period in the Tang Dynasty. Using unique language, he broadly reflects the social reality of the time, detailing the lives of everyone from the emperor and consorts to ordinary people, showcasing his deep emotions. The poem embodies Du Fu's "somber and forceful" style and stands as a model of "emotional and ambitious unity."

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