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The Confrontation and Symbiosis of the Body: The Narrative Presentation of the Electra Complex in Ge Fei's Peach Blossom Paradise

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Abstract. Ge Fei's *Peach Blossom Paradise* presents the Electra complex through the medium of the body, namely the girl's latent attachment to her father and invisible competition with her mother. Xiumei's fatherly desire and mother-daughter rivalry are concretely manifested through dreamlike narratives and bodily confrontations. The formation of this complex stems from the external family structure marked by the father's absence and the internal psychological roots of distorted mother-daughter symbiotic fantasies. Ge Fei's writing transcends individual psychological analysis, revealing the spiritual predicament of women in unbalanced families and providing a unique perspective for contemporary literary depictions of female experience.

Keywords: Electra complex, body, fatherly desire, mother-daughter, symbiotic fantasy

1. Introduction

As a core representative writer of the Chinese avant-garde, Ge Fei's creative process presents distinct characteristics of phased transformation. Academic research on Ge Fei has mostly focused on the narrative labyrinths and formal experiments of his early avant-garde fiction, forming a relatively mature research pattern. In the later stage of his writing, Ge Fei gradually abandoned the deliberate formal deconstruction of the avant-garde and instead returned to the writing of humanistic spirit and secular emotions. This important transformation has also become a new direction in recent studies of Ge Fei. However, a review of existing research results shows that current academic discussions of Ge Fei's later transformational novels mostly remain at the level of the return of humanistic spirit, and lack systematic discussion of the stable common feature of the Electra complex presented in many of Ge Fei's novels. The so-called Electra complex refers to a girl's latent attachment to her father, invisible competition with her mother, and psychological confrontation. This literary phenomenon of individual psychological traits has so far remained a problem area in Ge Fei studies that has not been fully interpreted and urgently needs further exploration.

The Electra complex is an important concept in psychoanalytic psychology and is usually regarded as the female counterpart of Freud's "Oedipus complex." Compared with the widely known Oedipus complex, its corresponding female concept had long been neglected. To fill the theoretical gap in the study of female psychological development, Carl Jung formally proposed the

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term “Electra complex” in 1913, taking Electra, a figure in Greek mythology, as its prototype. In the myth, Electra joins her younger brother in avenging their father and personally kills her mother and her mother’s lover. Jung borrowed this allusion to describe a specific stage in the process of female psychological development: at this stage, a girl develops unconscious emotional attachment and attraction toward her father, while viewing her mother as an object of emotional competition, and thereby develops jealousy, opposition, and even hostility. “That is to say, rage toward the mother, and longing for the father” [1]. In the process of dissemination, this complex has often been simplified into the popular sense of a “father complex.” Although this makes it easier to understand and spread, it largely obscures the theoretical original appearance of the concept. If the core of this complex were only “father fixation,” it would be difficult to explain the tragic significance of the Electra myth taking “matricide” as the climax of action. In fact, the psychological structure of the Electra complex is far from being summarized by the two words “father fixation.” Traditional theory has overly focused on the single emotional orientation of “father fixation,” but has generally neglected the complex emotional entanglement between mother and daughter—the girl at this stage both depends on her mother and regards her as a competitor; she both desires to grow into a mother-like woman and, because of the father’s emotional intervention, develops a hidden hostility toward the mother. The extreme plot of Electra’s matricide essentially metaphorizes the fact that the girl must psychologically “defeat” the mother in her inner world in order to complete the torn process of self-independence and growth. In Ge Fei’s *Peach Blossom Paradise*, Xiumi’s growth process is precisely a literary presentation of this psychological structure, and both her desire for her father and her jealousy of her mother are fully displayed through delicate bodily narration.

2. The bodily manifestation of subconscious desire for the father

In Ge Fei’s novels, female characters’ desire for the father rarely appears through conscious psychological expression. They themselves often do not realize this hidden emotional impulse, and subconscious desire is deeply compressed into bodily experience.

In *Peach Blossom Paradise*, Xiumi’s feelings toward Zhang Jiyuan are not expressed through explicit erotic language, but are repeatedly written through bodily reactions. When Zhang Jiyuan approaches, Xiumi has such reactions as “her heart beating wildly,” “half of her shoulder feeling numb and tingling,” “her feet not obeying her,” and “her body trembling even more violently.” On the one hand, at the level of consciousness, she constantly reminds herself to “move her hand away” and “move her body”; on the other hand, her body refuses to obey her will and falls into an obvious state of sensory disorder. This sharp split between consciousness and the body precisely exposes her uncontrollable emotional longing for Zhang Jiyuan in her subconscious. If sensory reactions beyond the control of the will are the initial manifestation of desire for the father, then dreams constitute the core subconscious channel for the body to cross boundaries.

In *Peach Blossom Paradise*, Xiumi’s dream about Zhang Jiyuan has strong symbolic significance. In reality, Xiumi’s desire for Zhang Jiyuan is suppressed by moral norms, but in Xiumi’s dream, the subconscious repressed by reality is released.

“Tell me, where is the door?” Xiumi looked at her cousin with a pitiful gaze and pleaded.

Zhang Jiyuan pulled her into his arms at once. His hand groped along her thigh, and he pressed his mouth close to her ear and murmured, “Sister, the door is here. It is open.” As he spoke, he wound the rope in his hand around her wrist. Seeing that her cousin was going to tie her up, Xiumi shouted with all her strength, “Do not tie me up [2]!”

In this dream, Xiumi’s “pitiful gaze” and “pleading” tone present a posture of willing submission; Zhang Jiyuan, however, as an irresistible male authority, completes his control over Xiumi’s body

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through a series of bodily actions such as "pulling her into his arms at once," "groping along her thigh with his hand," "pressing his mouth close to her ear," and "winding the rope around Xiumi's wrist." Female submission and male authority form strong dramatic tension. In this space completely dominated by the subconscious, Zhang Jiyuan is no longer the restrained cousin in reality, but has completely become the embodiment of Xiumi's desire. After waking from the dream and returning to reality, Xiumi is "still in shock." Xiumi's return to reality causes consciousness to suppress the subconscious once again, but Xiumi feels "empty inside." The rupture between dream and reality produces in Xiumi a feeling of loss. This feeling is not shame, but rather a loss arising from desire being awakened but unable to be realized. The dream here undertakes an important narrative function. It not only exposes the structure of desire in the subconscious, but also intensifies the tense state of the mother-daughter relationship and the family order in reality. The dream does not lead to action; instead, it deepens Xiumi's bodily unease in the waking state, allowing desire to continue to exist in reality in a more hidden way. This repressed desire is eventually transformed into Xiumi's hidden hostility toward her mother and her intense confrontation with her.

3. The bodily expression of the mother-daughter competitive relationship

The Electra complex is not a single desire for the father, but a complex psychological structure in which desire for the father and jealousy of the mother are intertwined. The rise of desire for the father is often accompanied by the daughter's instinctive competition with the mother and a strong motivation to replace the mother's position. As stated, "Her behavior obviously exceeded the proper role of a daughter. Whether in her feelings or her actions, she was more like a jealous wife. What she did might be easier to understand if it were placed on her mother [3]." Therefore, the mother-daughter relationship in Ge Fei's writing is not a tender and affectionate narrative, but a continuously tense emotional structure, while also bearing the dual functions of identification and rejection, dependence and competition.

In *Peach Blossom Paradise*, the relationship between the mother Meiyun and the daughter Xiumi is shrouded from beginning to end in a highly tense bodily atmosphere. When the mother and daughter reunite, the mother has deliberately "changed into a front-buttoned floral brocade cotton-padded jacket that she only wore during the New Year, combed her hair until it shone, and perfumed herself" [2]. Seeing Xiumi walking over, she becomes so excited that she "trembles, smiles, and cries." After her daughter has been away from home for many years, the mother attempts to rebuild her intimate relationship with her daughter through this deliberate dressing and ceremonial posture. However, in the face of her mother's warm welcome, Xiumi's bodily expression is very cold: "Her eyes stared straight at her, as if she were doubting whether the person standing before her was her mother [2]." Xiumi's posture of rejection toward her mother does not arise from a single event, but is the result of long-term repression. With the intervention of Zhang Jiyuan, a father-like figure, into the family, the mother-daughter relationship is further pushed into a hidden structure of romantic rivalry, and the mother also changes from a nurturer into a competitor who competes with the daughter for the same male resource. Ge Fei does not directly write this competitive structure as a conflict between romantic rivals, but presents it through subtle changes in bodily feelings.

"If that is the case, Xiumi, then you should not go," the mother thought for a moment and said with a frown.

As soon as the mother finished speaking, Xiumi suddenly threw the blue cloth bundle in her hand heavily onto the ground and said angrily:

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"I said long ago that I did not want to go, but you insisted that I go with you. Now that it has come to this, you do not allow me to go again. I really do not know what you mean."

After shouting like this, she herself was also startled. The mother stared at her blankly and could not speak for a long time. That gaze was as if she no longer recognized her. When the eyes of the mother and daughter met, it was like the meeting of knife blades. Unable to dodge in time, their two pairs of eyes were like mirrors, reflecting each other's inner world, and both of them were stunned [2].

In this plot, the hidden emotional struggle between the mother and daughter over Zhang Jiyuan is not expressed through direct verbal confrontation, but is concretely presented through a series of highly tense bodily movements and eye interactions. After Zhang Jiyuan proposes that they travel together, the mother suddenly overturns her previous attitude and firmly prevents Xiumi from going. This abrupt change directly triggers Xiumi's resistance, and her action of "throwing the bundle heavily onto the ground" externalizes her inner dissatisfaction and resistance through behavior. The mother's reaction of "staring blankly" contains both astonishment at her daughter's resistance and indescribable emotional waves. Finally, the mother and daughter fall into a silent game in the form of eye confrontation. The concrete description of "their gazes meeting like knife blades" pushes the unspoken emotional contest between the two around Zhang Jiyuan to the extreme, making this hidden struggle become increasingly vivid and perceptible in silent bodily and eye interaction. Xiumi's trembling and shy refusal before Zhang Jiyuan, together with the mother's sensitivity and defensiveness toward this relationship, jointly constitute a field of confrontation that needs no explicit statement. Then, why does such a tense competitive relationship form between Xiumi and her mother? What exactly is the deep root of this Electra complex?

4. The dual generative mechanism of the Electra complex

4.1. The absence of the father and the compensation of the father-like image

In the myth, the father Agamemnon is away fighting wars for a long time, while the homeland is left to the angry queen and the gradually growing Electra. "The absence of the father image further contributes to the fixation of the Electra complex. Just like Electra in the myth, who kills her mother in order to avenge her father, she always maintains her virginity in marriage, which not only demonstrates her loyalty to her father, but also shows her fear of becoming a mother [4]." Electra's extreme act of killing the mother and sacrificing to the father appears to be loyalty to the father, but in fact it is a desperate counterattack after the collapse of family order. The absence of the father makes her project all her emotional sustenance onto the father, while the mother's act of killing her husband not only destroys her spiritual pillar, but also completely breaks all her fantasies about normal family relations. This long-repressed love and hatred finally erupt in the most extreme way, resulting in the tragedy between mother and daughter.

The father frequently appears in the image of absence and does not assume the symbolic function of regulating the mother-daughter relationship. The mother becomes the powerful speaker in the family. In this unbalanced family structure, the Electra complex is constantly magnified in the absence of a mediating mechanism, and then gives rise to the daughter's father-fixation psychology and the invisible competition between mother and daughter.

In *Peach Blossom Paradise*, Xiumi's father is always in a position of being controlled and dealt with by the mother. He is treated, arranged, and even humiliated by the mother through ritual practices, becoming a puppet who can be manipulated by the mother at will, and completely loses the authority of the father. The father is locked in the attic by the mother for a long time and

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deprived of personal freedom. In the mediation of family relations, the father almost never plays any role between mother and daughter, and naturally cannot provide emotional support for Xiumi. It is precisely the long-term absence of Xiumi's father that makes Zhang Jiyuan, who has an ambiguous relationship with the mother, become a father-like image replacing the father. The invisible competition between Xiumi and her mother over Zhang Jiyuan is, in essence, Xiumi's silent resistance to her mother's excessive strength, and also an indirect revenge for the weak father. When the father cannot provide a buffer space for the mother-daughter relationship, the contradiction between mother and daughter cannot be dispersed or transferred, and can only circulate repeatedly between them and continue to intensify.

"If the father is unable to establish sufficient authority in the daughter's heart or unable to reconstruct his own position, then the conflict between mother and daughter may become exceptionally intense [5]." When the father is absent for a long time or loses authority, mother and daughter are forced into a close binding of mutual dependence, which also gives rise to a special mode of emotional interaction—the daughter's so-called "father fixation" is, in essence, not a true emotional attachment to the father, but an indirect attempt to gain the mother's attention and recognition through the act of competing for the father.

If the absence of the father and father-like compensation are the external causes of the Electra complex, then the deformed symbiotic fantasy between mother and daughter reveals the more hidden internal psychological root of this complex.

4.2. The deformed connection of the mother-daughter symbiotic fantasy

The bodily confrontation between mother and daughter around the "father" hides beneath this appearance a deformed symbiotic fantasy between mother and daughter. The so-called symbiotic fantasy refers to an individual's maintenance of self-worth through establishing an excessively dependent and unclear-boundary relationship with others. It functions through an interactive mode of emotional control, projective identification, and controlling others to satisfy one's own needs. "Symbiotic fantasy is a dyadic thing, a pair of two persons who intertwine with and indulge in each other. It contains more guilt than love, and the signs of emotion are never sufficient or satisfactory. It is a repressed interaction, and compared with that between mother and son, it occurs more frequently between mother and daughter [1]."

In *Peach Blossom Paradise*, the relationship between Xiumi and her mother is precisely a typical portrayal of symbiotic fantasy. In a family where the father has been absent for a long time, the mother becomes Xiumi's only object of emotional attachment, and at the same time also becomes the only authority and controller in the process of her growth. This close binding without a third-party buffer completely blurs the boundary between mother and daughter. The mother regards Xiumi as an extension of her own self-worth and attempts to completely control her life; Xiumi, in turn, gradually develops a fear of being swallowed up in her deep dependence on her mother. As for whether the mother actually redeemed her, Xiumi's heart is always filled with doubt and resentment. Her abuse of her own body is precisely a silent resistance launched against the mother's control in a self-destructive posture. By hurting the "self" that is the extension of the mother's narcissism, she punishes the mother for her neglect and deprivation of her.

After the mother and daughter reunite, the rift in this symbiotic relationship becomes increasingly obvious. Their getting along contains no tender intimacy; instead, it is filled with a kind of unfamiliar politeness, and estrangement and alienation quietly grow between them. Until the mother passes away, Xiumi "straightens the mother's clothes for her" and "closes her eyelids for her." These two highly ritualistic bodily actions are both a hope that the mother can leave with dignity and

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decency, and also a hidden emotional dialogue conducted by Xiumi with her mother through bodily interaction at the boundary between life and death. Afterward, Xiumi shuts herself and her mother's body together in the small room, which is both a kind of bodily care and a kind of emotional possession. Death never truly ends the relationship between the two; instead, in a closed form, it makes this symbiotic connection mixed with resentment and attachment become even more condensed, confirming the emotional bond between mother and daughter that cannot be severed.

Jealousy and pain become the bond connecting mother and daughter, causing both sides to sink deeply into an emotional predicament in which love and hatred are intertwined. This predicament not only strengthens the growth and spread of the psychology of "jealousy of the mother," but also reveals the most central and essential internal cause of the Electra complex: the so-called "father fixation" is nothing more than the appearance in which the daughter attempts, through the external act of competing for the father, to exchange for the mother's attention and to relieve the deformed entanglement between mother and daughter. Its emotional core always revolves around the deformed connection between mother and daughter that can neither be severed nor reconciled.

As Ikey Freud points out, behind the appearance of Electra's love for the father and hatred for the mother lies precisely her "fear of being swallowed by the authoritative mother image and her extreme longing for the mother's love and pity" [1]. This view deeply excavates, beneath the appearance of the Electra complex, the daughter's contradictory emotional core of both fear of and attachment to the mother. From the perspective of the essence of emotional connection, "the daughter's attachment and desire for the father precisely repeat her love and desire for the mother, and this original love and desire will maintain a long-lasting connection with the mother [6]." The knife raised by Electra, on the surface, points toward the betraying mother, but in fact it cuts toward the deified and untouchable mother image in her own heart, and even more kills the "ideal self." This revenge in the name of love eventually evolves into the total eruption of the long-term intertwining of love and hatred between mother and daughter. Xiumi's act of arranging her mother's remains after her mother's death and accompanying the body alone is precisely an extension of this deformed emotion. In an extreme way, it confirms the inseparable symbiotic connection between mother and daughter. It can thus be seen that the mother-daughter symbiotic fantasy and deformed emotional bond generated by the father's absence are the fundamental internal causes of the formation of the Electra complex.

5. Conclusion

In *Peach Blossom Paradise*, Ge Fei, through the unique method of bodily narration, profoundly presents the complex and realistic Electra complex embodied in Xiumi. This complex is not a simple "father fixation and mother jealousy" psychological pathology, but rather a tragic predicament into which a woman falls in the process of seeking self-identity and emotional liberation within a father-absent, mother-dominant unbalanced family structure.

Xiumi's subconscious attachment to Zhang Jiyuan is, in essence, a longing for the ideal father image and a compensation for the lack of paternal love; while her tense confrontation with her mother is the inevitable result of a deformed mother-daughter symbiotic fantasy. Their silent struggle around the father-like figure is, in reality, a cruel game concerning emotional belonging and the boundaries of the self. In this game, there are no true victors, only two equally lonely women, both desiring love yet mutually harming each other.

Ge Fei's writing of the Electra complex carries significance that transcends individual psychological analysis. More importantly, he does not simply regard this plot as a pathological psychology to be criticized, but treats it as an important entry point for understanding the female

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spiritual world. Through in-depth exploration of this complex psychological structure, Ge Fei demonstrates his profound concern for women's fate and provides a unique and insightful perspective for the writing of women in contemporary Chinese literature, enriching both its spiritual dimension and aesthetic value.

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