

The Female Growth Writing and Subject Construction of One Woman's War from the Perspective of Feminist Narrative

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Abstract

This study, from the perspective of feminist narrative, takes the growth trajectory of "physical awakening - spiritual breakthrough - identity reconstruction" of Domi in Lin Bai's "One Woman's War" as the main thread to explore the internal logic of female growth writing and subject construction. This study combines the narrative features of text fragmentation, recall and nonlinearity to analyze how narrative structure reflects the fragmentation and reconstruction process of female growth. It also reveals the impact of patriarchal educational deficiencies and gender discipline on female development by means of Ovvoir's "Other" theory and Sissot's "female writing" framework. Through case studies and interdisciplinary approaches, the research incorporates female education into the growth analysis framework, providing literary references for understanding the living conditions of contemporary women and reflecting on the gender dimension in education.

Keywords

Feminist narrative; 'One Woman's War'; Women's growth; Women's education; Lin Bai.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Lin Bai's "A Woman's War" is a landmark text in Chinese feminist literature and individualized writing in the 1990s. It systematically presents the process of female "self-subjectivity" construction through the growth thread of Domi's "body awakening - spiritual breakthrough - identity reconstruction"[1]. Against the backdrop of the continuous improvement of contemporary women's self-awareness, how to breakthrough traditional gender discipline and complete the construction of the growth subjectivity still holds significant academic value and practical significance. Domi's story is a typical microcosm of women's growth in the 1990s. The growth predicament, subject breakthrough path and self-cognition logic it reflects have important reference value for the establishment of contemporary women's subject identity and the theoretical and practical development of women's growth education [2-4].

1.2. Current research status at home and abroad

Research on non-narrative discourse: Domestic research mainly follows the conceptual framework proposed by Hu Yamin in "Narratology", and has been continuously supplemented and disputed by scholars such as Peng Zhen, Han Yingqi, Gu Pan, and Xu Liming in terms of functional classification, historical evolution, and definition expansion. However, there are still problems such as ambiguous concept boundaries, concentrated research objects, and a lack of systematic exploration.

Research on "A Woman's War": The focus is mainly on the in-depth character portrayal and psychological description in the novel, especially the presentation of Domy's living conditions, inner world, and spiritual predicament.

Feminist research: It covers feminist critical theories (such as Beauvoir's "Other" theory and Butler's gender performance), feminist subjectivity theories (such as Nussbaum's "agency and freedom"), and feminist body theories (the body as a product of social and cultural construction). Domestic scholars (such as Li Yinhe) have introduced and localized these theories, and proposed concepts such as "female writing".

Research gaps: Existing research mostly views female growth as a linear upward process, ignoring its cyclical and complex nature of "progress - regression - re-emergence". The exploration of how narrative strategies (such as fragmented memories, inner monologues, and time jumps) specifically construct the growth experience is still relatively superficial, and there is a lack of systematic analysis of the interaction between narrative form and the theme of growth.

2. Research Method

2.1. Case study method

This study adopts a case study method to focus on Domi, the protagonist of the novel A Woman's War. By analysing the key growth nodes at different stages of her life - physical awakening, spiritual breakthrough, identity recognition and reconstruction, combined with her historical background and personal situation, we interpret the changes in her psychological state and subjective consciousness.

2.2. Intimate Reading Method

Use intimate reading to examine the ideological connotation and artistic value of the text. By integrating plot fragments, psychological descriptions and environmental details, we can trace the complete development trajectory of Duomi and explain the reasons behind its psychological and behavioural changes. At the same time, it explores how narrative skills (fragmentation, recollection, non-linear narrative) are related to the theme of women's growth, and how to express women's experience and self-awareness [5,6].

2.3. Interdisciplinary approach

This method combines feminist theory and literary criticism. Using Simone de Bovoire's theory of "others" to explain Domi's situation in a patriarchal society - her position as an "other" who is stared at and oppressed, and the process of her resistance. Helen Sisos' theory of "female writing" is used to analyse the presentation of women's physical experience, private emotions and individual memories in novels, and to explain how this way of writing promotes the awakening of women's self-consciousness [5,7].

3. The Spiritual Trajectory of Domi's Image and the Awakening of the Female Subject from a Feminist Perspective

3.1. The germ of subject awakening: self-awareness and enlightenment at least in the female stage of childhood

The awakening of the main body of Duomi comes from forced loneliness. She lost her father when she was three years old, and her mother worked outside all year round, so she completed the process of "individualisation" at an early age and faced the surrounding environment alone. Although this loneliness is painful, it becomes the cradle of self-consciousness, forcing her to retreat into imagination and "distinguating herself from the surrounding environment

prematurely" - this is the first flash of the subject consciousness [4]. If loneliness is the container, the physical experience is the content. Domi's self-awareness does not start from the external mirror, but comes from the inner body perception: "This self-viewing behaviour began in a very early period" (five or six years old, in mosquito nets). The mosquito net is both a shelter and a cage. Domi's childhood loneliness (father's death, mother's absence, "hungry skin") and her initial understanding of female identity are two sides of the same coin. Loneliness is not only a trauma, but also a hidden soil for awakening. Her estranged relationship with her mother (the family is regarded as "internal"), the fantasy of the death of a loved one, and the search for a sense of security in the mosquito net all reflect this. However, loneliness is not entirely negative - it provides her with a space to escape the gaze of discipline.

In this lonely land, Domi began to explore his body: staring in the mirror, masturbating, watching childbirth, and playing sexual games. These taboo behaviours challenge the "pure" and "shy" female image required by traditional gender norms [5,8]. But resistance and self-restraint coexist: she knew that masturbation "will not be seen by others", and avoided same-sex love (Nandan) and was afraid that she was "abnormal". This reveals how the dual framework of "normal/abnormal" becomes a regulatory tool for patriarchy. Her most controversial fantasy involves "rape". Lin Bai used "masochism" to describe Domi's state: longing for strong physical contact, and at the same time, he was both afraid and yearned for men. These fantasies expose the deep dilemma of women under the patriarchal system. The real temptation of Domi's travel alone also confirms that this dilemma is a structural gender problem, not an accidental event. She dreamed of "being controlled by a powerful force and getting married against her will", which reflected her resistance and doubt of men's nature. She criticised the male image ("Vulgar and Despicable") and the male body ("unaesthetic...full of filth") and established a female perspective that broke the traditional narrative convention. The contact with the "bad girl" (Yao Qiong, Nan Dan) became an inspiration and showed another life for women. Nandan's praise "reawakened the female consciousness of Domi". However, this awakening is limited: she restrains herself, resists homosexual tendencies, falls into a dependent love with the director, and is eventually exploited, abandoned, and forced to have an abortion. Her departure was full of tragedy and blindness - it was an "incomplete awakening", revealing the complex picture of feminist enlightenment in the 1990s [1,6].

3.2. The struggle of the subject's awakening: self-confusion and mental exhaustion in youth

The core contradiction that runs through the whole growth process of Domi is the tug-of-war between "desire to be recognised" and "adherence to self". This dynamic tension constitutes the spiritual core of "A Woman's War": Domi is eager for social acceptance, but she can't give up exploring herself; she needs the eyes of others to confirm her existence, but she resists being defined by others. In her youth, the desire for recognition was particularly strong [2,7]. Compared with Yao Qiong, praise "reawakened the female consciousness of Duomi" - she felt her own value through the eyes of others. And the relationship with the director is more extreme: she idealises him and puts all her value on his love. When she was abandoned, she was not angry, but "loved him more" - which is the ultimate embodiment of traditional women's materialisation of self-worth. However, Domi did not blindly give in. Deep down, another force always exists: sticking to one's own authenticity can be expressed through resistance, escape and writing. She instinctively rejects the image of a "good girl". Since childhood, curiosity about "dangerous things" (such as physical exploration and sexual games) reflects a life instinct - the desire to understand oneself and explore boundaries, even if it is labelled as "not serious". Writing has become an important way for her to resist. In the college dormitory, she found that she "can wrap herself up with words". She writes about women's bodies, desires and loneliness - these themes are often regarded as "private", "trivial" or "vulgar" in mainstream literary

discourse. In this way, she rejected the standard that only "grand narrative" is worth writing. Finally, frequent geographical movements (hometown → city N → southwest → Beijing) also shows that she does not want to be bound by fixed characters (daughter, student, writer, girlfriend). She needs a different space to explore "who I am". Although escape often brings bad results, the behaviour of escape itself becomes a process of self-construction: she is trying,

3.3. The establishment of the awakening of the subject: self-confirmation from confusion to redemption

As an adult, Domi experienced a profound transformation from confusion and decline to redemption, although the process was not linear, but full of repetition, struggle and self-tearing [4,9]. In the long "single-person war", she gradually got rid of the confused individual bound by desire and social norms, and grew up to be a subject who could examine, write and define herself. Her relationship with the director became her first true intimate relationship and the deepest trauma [2,6]. She idealised him, completely submitted to him, and internalised the traditional female discipline: the value of women depends on the recognition of men. When she was abandoned, she was not angry, but "loved him more". Lin Bai revealed: "Domi doesn't know that what she loves is not that man, but love itself - or the self that sacrifices herself in love." Abortion became her darkest moment. Just by enduring physical pain and spiritual humiliation, she felt that something essential had been hollowed out - her self. The girl who used to find herself through writing and escape has now completely lost her subjectivity. She fell into a passive drift: "She felt like a fallen leaf, floating in the wind." The turning point appears in the writing. After picking up the pen, she turned her traumatic experience into words and regained control of her life. Writing brings healing: she re-examines the trauma of betrayal, abortion and travel. No longer a passive recipient, she became an active narrator and regained the right to interpret her life. In addition, she challenged the hegemony of patriarchy by writing about women's private experiences (body, desire, fertility) - topics that were once degraded to "trivial" and "unworthy". Lin Bai said, "Those corners of shame and oppression by society are the starting point for us to re-understand ourselves." Another key point is her reconciliation with her mother. Once estranged mother (the family is regarded as "internal"), Domi got to know her again and saw that her mother was a single mother struggling to survive under social discipline. She realised: "It's not that my mother doesn't love me, but that she can't love me at all." Domi understands that his loneliness, fear and contradictions are not personal defects, but the products of women's situation under specific historical conditions. The reconciliation with her mother is also the reconciliation between her and her own female identity. She no longer regarded it as a burden or shame, but accepted and embraced it, realising that her experience - no matter how painful it was - was precious and worth writing and passing on.

4. Fragmented, Reminiscential, and Non-linear Narratives: The Broken and Reconstructed Expressions of Female Growth

Lin Bai divides "looking back" into three types: First, "seeing a real event that has occurred"; Second, "It only happened in my imagination. In fact, it never happened, but I felt that I saw it." Thirdly, "Looking back at the present from the future is the best way for me to quickly find the expression of my feelings." It is evident that Lin Bai was fully aware of the significant role of time in narrative and attempted to organically integrate the past, present and future through the "looking back" perspective, allowing reality, memory and imagination to collide with each other, thereby constructing an aesthetic space with rich personalized colors. Lindbergh "a people's war" is the typical "look back" narrative, and three types of back way combined with each other. The novel consists of four chapters, respectively telling the stories of "my" childhood and same-sex friendship, writing poetry and taking the college entrance examination,

traveling alone in different cities during college years, and falling in love with a film director, etc. All these stories revolve around memories. The main framework of the novel basically follows the first kind of retrospection, that is, recalling "what really happened". But when the narrator tells each important story, they sometimes push the time forward, pointing to the past events that have passed. Sometimes it gets closer and returns to reality. However, reality is not entirely true; rather, it has been integrated into "what happens in imagination". Sometimes, the perspective is also placed in the future, imagining what will happen many years later. Due to the narrator shuttling in and out among various different "looks back", the linear narrative of the novel is thus interrupted, resulting in the fragmented feature of the narrative. For instance, in the first chapter of the novel, the present tense is used at the beginning: Domi masturbates in front of the mirror. Then the focus shifts to the past, depicting the innocent sex games of the kindergarten days and the death dreams of childhood. The narrator keeps inserting the words "Recalling my childhood days" into the recollections, causing the recollections to collide with the real time and space. If "my" childhood story was "something that happened in reality", then the characters interspersed in it seemed to occur "in imagination". Then, the narrative time is pulled back from ten years ago to last summer and zoomed in to yesterday, telling the story of "me" and the mysterious woman's encounter by the river. This mysterious woman is more like a non-existent fantasy, but the narrator links her to yesterday's reality, attempting to convince people of her authenticity. The narrative forks once again, shifting from personal imagination to historical legends, introducing a ghost story about Town B, and then returns to the long-shelved theme of childhood. The theme of childhood also incorporates a perspective of future time. For instance, when recalling the sense of lack of love in childhood, the narrator "places himself in the future time" to observe the experience at that time. She said, "It was only many years later, when I held my baby in my arms, stroking her face and body, that I realized how much a living child needs the caress of their loved ones." The time perspective of "many years later" appears in many places in the novel. Whether recalling childhood or teenage years, narrators often place themselves in the future "many years later", juxtaposing and connecting the past and the future, memories and the present, creating a contrasting contrast. When recalling the various coldness that Comrade Li had towards "me" during the days of the educated youth, the camera suddenly switched to the scene when "I" met him at the railway station many years later when "I" returned to B Town from the provincial capital: "He was still wearing the same white work uniform as back then, and his hair was completely white." "I" felt that "the years of B Town were swiftly passing by" and "silently drifting away with the start of the train. Many years later, when I look back on this period, I gaze at that girl in Town B. She was wearing a blue dress and blue pants, leaping under the steel-blue sky of Town B. Many years later, Domi came to Beijing from another province to work as a journalist. By looking back, the past is brought back to life. Meanwhile, the recreated past events reflect and overlap with the reality "many years later". Therefore, the past will no longer be what it was before, and the present also acquires an extraordinary meaning due to its hidden connection with the past [7, 10].

Chapter Three: Passivity and Resistance in Intimate Relationships: The Fragmentation and Reconstruction of Women's Self-Perception

4.1. The passivity of the multi-metre intimate relationship: trapped in the traditional gender hierarchy.

If you read carefully, it can be seen that Domi seems to be active in physical exploration and emotional pursuit, but in fact, he is deeply trapped in the passive framework built by traditional gender norms. Her relationship with men is manifested as dependence and attention, making her the "other" described by Simone de Beauvoir [6,8]. This passivity does not stem from personal defects, but from the suppression of the traditional gender order system. Duomi's "war" itself

has become a tragic struggle between mirror image and confinement, constantly swinging between narcissism and self-destruction. Her relationship with director N is the typical embodiment of a dependent intimate relationship. She loved him "crazily" and endured abortion, but confessed, "I don't think I ever really loved him - I just loved my own obsession with love." What she loves is not that person, but the illusion of "love itself". Her dependence does not point to a specific male, but the identity of "being loved" rooted in the "absent father's love" in childhood. What she longs for is not equality, but a feeling of being "obscured" - a willingness to give up on herself.

If dependence is an internal passive structure, then being stared at is its external expression. Domi loves the mirror and experiences "full of narcissistic love and a slight self-inflicted pain". When a person confirms his existence only by being "seen", she is both eager to be recognised and afraid of being judged. Her relationship has always been trapped in the cycle of "staring and being stared at". After experiencing sexual assault in college, she called this encounter a "priceless extraordinary encounter" - internalising male desires into self-worth, and even beautifying violent behaviour. As De Bovoir pointed out, women are defined as "others". The narcissism completed by Domi through the mirror (Lacan: The 'self' in the mirror is an illusion) has always been limited to the male aesthetic framework [1,2,5]. Her relationship with women is different: she worships Yao Qiong and Nan Dan as subjects, not objects. However, when Nandan expressed his same-sex love, Domi ran away. Her fear stems from her concern about the unacceptable social situation in a patriarchal society. She may appreciate women in private, but she dare not embrace the identity of an "outsider". Her self-identity is still based on the recognition of the male society.

Domi's life follows a recurring escape pattern: setback → escape → new relationship → fall into setback again. Three escapes: after the plagiarism of poetry (town B → city N); after the abandonment of director N (married an older man); at the end of the novel (roaming the streets of Beijing). Every escape seems to be voluntary, but it leads to a new attachment - she has never really gained personal autonomy.

4.2. Resistance in emotional relationships: the awakening and breakthrough of women's self-consciousness.

Lin Bai wrote: "A lonely war means hitting yourself, blocking yourself against the wall, or destroying yourself like a flower." This declaration of self-destruction reveals the core paradox of women's awakening - the object of resistance is not a specific male, but a system that requires women to "rely".

The relationship between Domi and director N is the embodiment of the resistance to dependence. What she loves is not N, but her own romantic ideals - a narcissistic perspective that regards N as a projected object. When the real power relationship intervened, N took advantage of her feelings and forced her to have an abortion. Domi chose to escape and declared: "Love is more cruel than death." Her escape was not to lose love, but to realise that staying in the world meant complete self-destruction. Resistance has become a desperate survival strategy, not victory. The fundamental question is: who does a woman's body and desire belong to? The beginning of the novel is about myself in the multi-metre gaze mirror. Feminist critics do not regard it as pathological, but as an embodiment of "the establishment of self-existence and resistance to male dominance". By staring at herself, she rejected the male gaze. In the face of same-sex love (Nandan), what Domi felt was not disgust, but fear: "I'm afraid of being born as a lesbian and being isolated from normal society forever." Her escape was not obedience, but in China in the early 1990s, she soberly realised the reality of existence. Lin Bai pointed out that Domi did not pursue the narrative of "victory". Real growth lies not in rejecting relationships, but in "learning to maintain one's identity in it". Domi's goal is not to become a "woman who doesn't need a man", but a person who "doesn't define himself through men". The phrase "A

woman's war means marrying herself" symbolises her ultimate awakening: when "who to be" replaced "who to marry" as a life mission, women realised the spiritual resistance to patriarchy. Domi did not win the battle against men, but she won reconciliation with herself - the value of women is not acquired through intimacy, but created through self-expression.

4.3. Fragmentation and reconstruction trajectory of self-awareness

In the process of "rebellion", Domi's fragmentation and reconstruction of self-consciousness was not achieved overnight, but went through a long and circular process of self-exploration, accompanied by regression and repetition [7,9]. The first step involves reoccupying physical identity. After being abandoned by N, Domi made a seemingly "self-destructive" decision - she began to write. Lin Bai wrote, "Domi wants to write a book, a book about herself." Writing here is not a career choice, but a "self-naming" behaviour in the sense of existence. When Domi writes "I", she is no longer just the object of the narrative, but becomes the subject of the narrative [6]. She recorded those fragmented experiences - foster childhood, humiliating schooling time and abandoned love - not to blame anyone, but to confirm that these events did happen to me, but they did not fully define my entire existence. The second step involves the reintegration of desire. Domi's exploration of same-sex love (her relationship with Nandan) is often simplified, but from an educational perspective, this represents her attempt at "alternative possibilities" - she keeps asking herself: Do I have to obey the female image stipulated by society? Does my desire have to conform to the template of heterosexual marriage? Her final departure was not to "correct" herself, but because she soberly realised that choosing homosexuality in that era meant deeper loneliness. This is not a compromise, but a kind of strategic self-preservation: survival takes precedence over becoming a real self. The third and most critical step is to get rid of the mysterious aura of "normality". Domi chose to get married at the age of thirty. Some readers may interpret this choice as "despair comes from complete helplessness", but if you read the text carefully, you will find that Domi's marriage goes beyond the traditional meaning of "marrying into a family". Lin Bai wrote, "Domi married that man, but she never really integrated into his life." Throughout the marriage, Domi has always maintained writing, private space and secrets. She learned to keep emotional distance in relationships while guarding her core identity in imperfect reality. This represents a more mature form of resistance - not confronting the world, but still refusing to give in to the world knowing that it will not change because of her. The ending sentence of the novel, "A woman married herself", has profound educational significance. What it expresses is not lonely self-enclosure, but the ultimate affirmation of individual autonomy.

5. Women's Self-Education and "One Woman's War"

In *A Woman's War*, Domi escaped from a remote town through academic success, entered the university, and tried to express himself through writing. Education not only provides her with a practical way out, but also becomes a support for identifying her and resisting trauma [1,4]. From the perspective of feminism, her study experience not only shows the possibility of self-empowerment brought by knowledge, but also reveals the complex shaping of women's growth by the traditional gender order.

College is a crucial leap - knowledge has changed her destiny, broadened her horizons, and enabled her to express herself. However, education does not really bring inner peace of mind. It pushed her from the edge to the centre, but failed to bridge the deep gap between her and the outside world. Domi experiences the spiritual paradox shared by many educated modern women: the more knowledge she has, the clearer she is aware of the situation of "others", and the difficulty of breaking through will increase.

The fragmented narrative of the novel reflects this. The study journey of Duomi is not in chronological order, but scattered in the form of fragments (the advantages of middle school,

the confusion of the countryside, the trauma of college), intertwining with physical experience, emotional fluctuations and creative attempts. This conscious strategy maps the fragmentation of women's self-awareness under patriarchy. Her path is not a smooth upward arc, but a path full of twists and turns, plagiarism, emotional frustration and rape - each interruption marks the obstacles faced by women.

The retroactive narrative created "healing sex education". Through the dialogue between the present and the past, Domi re-examines those moments covered by trauma and transforms "traumatic memories" into "spiritual resources". Education thus becomes an active reconstruction rather than a passive encounter. For Domi, real education is not externally instilled knowledge, but continuous self-shaping through writing, recollection and self-examination - her "women's war".

Enlightenment to modern women's education:

Create a space for girls to "tell their own stories" (such as diaries, writing, sharing). The goal is not to cultivate "girls with high scores", but to enable young women to talk about "who I am, what I have experienced, and what I believe in". Self-narration is the core resource for maintaining subjectivity.

Include physical education in the core agenda, instead of marginalising it as a shy "physiological hygiene class". Girls need a shameless environment to understand their bodies, desires and boundaries. Only when the body is no longer a forbidden place of silence can women truly distinguish between autonomy and being stared at. Domi's sense of shame and self-isolation after being raped reveals the far-reaching impact of lack of physical education. Today's self-education of gender, sex and body is to fill this gap.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of feminist narrative, this study explores Domi's growth and female subject construction in Lin Bai's *One Woman's War*. It finds that fragmented, recollective and non-linear narratives echo the tortuous process of women's self-fragmentation and reconstruction. Based on relevant feminist theories, it reveals that patriarchal discipline and insufficient gender education hinder female growth, while self-narration, body education and independent learning serve as vital paths for women's self-construction. This research deepens the understanding of Lin Bai's works and provides meaningful references for improving gender-inclusive female education and promoting contemporary women's healthy development.

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