

Study on Alice Monro's Runaway from the Perspective of Cognitive Theory

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Abstract

Cognitive Theory uses the research methods and theories of cognitive to analyze literary works and provides a new perspective for literary interpretation. It also establishes a close relationship between literary theory and linguistic theory. Based on the framework of cognitive poetics, this paper uses the skills of rhetorical devices to analyze Runaway, to interpret the sustained development and renewal of the plot of the text, the world of the heroine Carla and the metaphorical relationship with Flora, in order to reveal the ultimate development of self-consciousness reflected in Runaway.

Keywords

Cognitive theory, Alice Monro, Rhetorical devices.

1. Introduction

Cognitive theory mainly talks about literary reading. Cognition is about the mental process of reading. Theory pays attention to literary skills. To grasp the content of cognitive theory accurately, we should first make clear the purpose of reading and what literature we understand. The answers to these questions will lead us to the most important core part. They will appear before us like a unique, conscious, intelligent and critical person, sharing each other's ability to understand and understand each other's language. In the process of exploring these problems, we will not only be satisfied with some important problems and difficult problems; we will also try to give some answers, or at least put forward some ideas to solve them. Alice Monro's masterpiece Runaway won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013. Runaway tells the story of the heroine who chose to flee because of her dissatisfaction with the present situation and her yearning for different life, and then chose to return after her escape. She also has a new thought on life in the process of escape and return. In Monro's works, the rich and delicate inner world of women is presented to readers: confusion about real life, excitement at the beginning of escape, struggle on the way and meditation after return. Escape portrays the heroine Carla and her parents, husband Clark, Jameson couple, Flora lamb and other main characters, which constitute the basic elements of the text world. The description of rainy weather, Carla's life with her parents, two escapes, Flora's mysterious disappearance and Carla's return to her husband constitute a series of functional propositions, which promote the development of the plot and enrich Carla's characters, and present Carla's tragic fate hidden in modern civilized society to readers. In the pursuit of self and freedom, the awakened female consciousness finally compromised to fate and could not escape fate. She could only accept the real life she had questioned and hated, which meant that she would eventually lose herself.

2. Rhetorical Devices

2.1. Animal Metaphor

Metaphor involves conceptual metaphor and linguistic metaphor. Conceptual metaphor is the deep structure of metaphor, while linguistic metaphor is the external expression. The diversification of linguistic metaphor indicates that metaphor is not a single linguistic phenomenon, but a systematic mapping from one conceptual domain to another, from the source domain to the target domain. Mapping links the concepts of two different fields, explains and understands abstract or strange things with concrete or familiar things, and forms a cognitive way. In *Runaway*, the heroine Carla flees twice and finally returns to real life. Flora the lamb also disappears mysteriously and returns bizarrely.

Through the analysis of the mapping relationship between Carla and Flora through metaphor theory, the implicit relationship between their escape and return process is deeply interpreted. They really have close relationship, when Flora was unhappy with Clark, she will always go to Flora to find some comfort, because in her heart she really hope someone to care for her and love her from the inner heart, this is also a process of finding herself freedom.

The text mentions that Flora was brought back from the market by Carla's husband. It describes "At first she had been Clark's pet entirely, following him everywhere, dancing for his attention... But as she grew older she seemed to attach herself to Carla, and in this attachment she was suddenly much wiser, less skittish..." Flora's personified image and its growth and change reflect that Carla grew up from an innocent girl and had her own ideological pursuit and desire. The hidden female consciousness in her heart awakened and developed in the process of pursuing her self. Later, the article describes Flora's disappearance, "The worst thing, as far as Carla was concerned, was the absence of Flora... And Carla was afraid that wild dogs or coyotes had got her, or even a bear. and presented the content of Kara's dream," Her leg seemed to be hurt, but she ran anyway.. Flora slipped through it, hurt leg and all, just slithered through like a white eel and disappeared. Flora's leg was injured, but she still ran away, and led Carla to the wire fence, then disappeared. In the dream, Flora was still persistently fleeing despite her injury, leaving Carla alone in confusion and hesitation. And Carla was led to the scene at the fence.

It really implies that Carla's inner desire to pursue her self, and her inner feminine consciousness is also surging. Previously Carla hopes that she and husband will have a good life in the future, considering him as the designer and spiritual pillar, but her husband's indifference and irritability let her fantasy of a good life disillusioned. In the past, when Carla was unhappy, she was not accompanied by her husband, but by this gentle and witty Flora. Therefore, the disappearance of Flora made her completely lose the object of her talk. She wandered in this lonely and melancholy world as if she had lost herself. Flora left her familiar surroundings and favorite Carla behind a sense of mystery and wonders about her fate. The mysterious disappearance of Flora is a true portrayal of Carla's life and final fate. Flora's departure heralds Carla's second escape.

In the process of escaping, Carla has been struggling with her thoughts. She tried to control her fate, but found that her husband had occupied an important position in her life. Her thoughts and life depended entirely on her husband. The first time she bravely fled from her parents was because of her husband's company. It can be seen that the awakening and development of Carla's female consciousness was based on her dependence on men. Therefore, Carla's feminine consciousness was instantly annihilated when she was worried about how to survive without her husband, and she gave up pursuing her ideal life.

There are also some other examples Munro used to say the process of finding herself and return in *Runaway*. It is reflected through the metaphor of birds.

“Birds were everywhere. Red-winged blackbieds, robins, a pair of doves sang at daybreak. Lots of crows, and gulls on reconnoitering missions from the lake, and big turkey buzzards that sat in the branches of a dead oak about half a mile away, at the edge of the woods. At first, they sat there, drying out their voluminous wings, lifting themselves to let the sun and the warm air do their work. In a day or so they were restored, flying high, circling and dropping to earth, disappearing over the woods, coming back to rest in the familiar bare tree.” (Munro,2004:43).

Different kinds of birds are just like different groups of people very person had their freedom to live his or her happy life. They can go to different places and take a deep breath on the beach, or they can climb up to the climax of the mountains just like a bird. But no matter where a person goes, how far it is from his home to the place or she stayed, they will all come back home, or we say return to place where they stayed. Because they have their relatives, or the closest friend or lovers. Just like the bird “coming back to rest in the familiar bare tree.” Birds represents freedom, in her heart she really hope to fly high in the sky. However, husband is more important than freedom, because people have to go home.

2.2. Environmental Metaphor

Literally, environment means all the circumstances, people, things and events around people that influence their life. But here, it means particular natural surroundings in which you live or exist, here environmental metaphor foregrounding the meaning of natural environment.

“It’s a summer of rain and more rain. When you wake up in the morning, the first sound you hear is the sound of rain, which sounds loudly on the roof of a moving house. The path was muddy and deep, the long grass was full of water, and the leaves on the head would pour a small shower, even though it was not really raining at this time, the clouds seemed to be drifting away.” Westerners like to talk about the weather when they meet together, sunny day means good mood, happy atmosphere. Comparingly, rainy day means sad, a little bit gloomy. So because of the bad weather, a sign is embedded in the article. Unhappy weather and unhappy mood make Carla wants to get away. Clark “did not pay attention to anything but the computer screen speed up the runaway of Carla.” Here Flora appears and becomes the spiritual pillar of Carla. So when Flora disappeared, he also wants to go with Flora and find happiness and freedom with it. Even though Flora died at last and he feels there is a needle in the throat, he continued his life, because she is eager to prove that she has made a correct choice, and he didn’t want to leave Clark. Clark is somebody that really matters.

2.3. Metaphor of Characters’ Names

Besides the conceptual metaphor of natural settings and animals, the characters’ name in this collection is deserved to attach great concerns on this ingenious arrangement.

In the interlinked stories Chance, Soon and Silence, when the heroine Juliet pays the first visit back to her hometown to see her parents, Sam asks Juliet what the baby’s name is. Juliet answers her father: “Penelope”. We’re never going to call her Penny. Penelope. (Munro, 2004:93) It is known to those who are familiar with the Greek mythology that Penelope is the wife of Odysseus, not to mention Juliet, M.A. in classic literature and a teacher teaching Greek in a private school. In Homer’s Odyssey, Penelope is depicted as Odysseus’s intelligent and faithful wife, who keeps her suitors at bay in the long time of his absence. Eventually she reunites with her husband Odysseus. Her name has traditionally been associated with marital faithfulness (Mackail, 1916:8), and so it was with the Greeks and Romans. In Latin references to Penelope revolved around the sexual loyalty to her absent husband. It suited the marital aspect of Roman society representing the tranquility of the worthy family.

We all know that when Penelope grow up, she leaves his mother Juliet. Sometimes she writes cards to her mother in order to let her know she is ok. For getting the information of her daughter, Juliet stay in one place for a long time. It can be seen that the love towards Penelope is so deep.

2.4. Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which inanimate objects or attractions are represented with human qualities or form. The use of personification allows the writer to condense and make more vivid descriptions of impersonal subjects and abstract ideas. Below are some examples in *Runaway*:

“But Clark? who had formerly made the little mare his pet? had refused to have anything more to do with her. Lizzie’s feelings were hurt, in consequence - she was balky when exercised and kicked up a fuss when her hoofs had to be picked out? As they did every day? lest they develop a fungus.” (Munro, 2004: 7)

It is known to all that human beings like to treat their pets as humans, just as the member of the family, so here the author uses “her” instead of “it”, they think dogs have their own feelings just like friends, which should not be ignored. Personification makes people see Lizzie more vividly. There is another example in which inanimate things are personified.

“The path is muddy and deep. The long grass sucks up the water. The leaves on the head will pour a small shower. Even if the sky is not really raining at this time, the clouds seem to be drifting away.” (Munro, 2004: 3)

The path, grass, leaves are inanimate things in nature, they can’t “pour a small shower”, but here the plants and things are personified. Let us see a vivid picture after the rain. The cleanness and beauty of the nature is shown to the readers easily.

3. Conclusion

In the collection of *Runaway*, the whole motif is escape, escaping from the tedious present life: daughters escape from parents, the fiancée escapes from the fiancé, the wife escapes from the husband, but all of them end with return. As a brilliant writer, Munro doesn’t lay any comment on those two choices of life: to leave or to return, but employ the rhetorical devices, to make the information she tends to convey foregrounding, which catch the readers’ attention and then lead them to find out the theme by themselves in the process of reading.

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