

## 女性声音的重现——《潜入沉船》与《福》之比较

李月宝

(厦门大学 外文学院, 福建 厦门 361005)

**摘要:**作为多产女性主义作家艾德里安娜·里奇的里程碑式的作品,“潜入沉船”一诗揭示了诗中的女性叙述者如何通过“潜入沉船”这一象征性的动作和否定男权社会下的传统神话而让自己的声音和历史一步步得到再现。通过与库切的《福》相比较,可以发现两者在“重现女性历史”这一主题上的相似性。但是,两部作品中女主人公的不同命运更凸显了里奇对女性出路的独特视角:与男性一起建构一个多元、雌雄同体、统一的身份;同时这也引发了人们对“女性的根在何处”及“其将来之路”的思考。

**关键词:**潜入沉船;探寻;女性声音;集体性;《福》

中图分类号:I106 文献标识码:A 文章编号:1009-5039(2012)15-0184-03

The Rediscovery of the Female Voice: A Comparative Reading of “Diving into the Wreck” and *Foe*

LI Yue-bao

(College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005, China)

**Abstract:** As the landmark works of the prolific feminist writer Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck” reveals how the female narrator in the poem rediscovers her own female voice and history step by step through the symbolic act of diving into the wreck and the denial of traditional myths constructed by the patriarchal society. Through a comparative reading of the poem and John Maxwell Coetzee’s *Foe*, the similarity in the theme of the quest for the female history between them is easy to be found. However, the different fates of the female narrators in the two works highlight Rich’s unique perspective of the way out for the female: to construct a multiple, androgynous, unifying identity with the male; meanwhile, the different fates also set people thinking about “where the root of the female history is” and “how they should go in the future”.

**Key words:** *Diving into the wreck*; quest; female voice; collectivity; *Foe*

The female history is “a book of myths in which our names do not appear” (Rich, 210). This is what Adrienne Rich states in the final stanza of “Diving into the Wreck”, the very poem which best represents Rich’s explicitly feminist writing. Rich is a co-winner of the National Book Award for poetry for *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971–1972*. In her poetry and prose, “[she] has supplied us with a wealth of metaphors and images” that help to explore women’s “collective and personal history so as to better understand where [the female] are now” (Stein, 127). This poem, written in the 1970s when the Second Wave Feminism was thriving, reveals the quest for the female history and the awakening of the female voice through a female’s symbolic act of diving into the wreck. The female narrator’s effort to seek the female history and voice in this poem has a surprising similarity with the female castaway Susan Barton’s struggle of telling her own history and constructing the female identity in John Maxwell Coetzee’s *Foe*. Coetzee’s *Foe*, published in 1986, is a reworking of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, in which Coetzee subverts the colonial discourse in Defoe’s canonical work and makes the female voice heard by adding the female protagonist Susan Barton to the novel. After reading the novel, it is easy to find the affinities between *Foe* and “Diving into the

Wreck”. In this case, how is the female voice liberated in “Diving into the Wreck” compared with that in *Foe*?

The poem starts with the female narrator’s preparation for the diving. But what is the purpose of diving into the wreck under the sea and why does she choose diving instead of other actions? Here, the poem allegorizes “the sea as a medium of pure knowing wholly distinct from the compromised, constructed world above” (Gilbert 144); and the significant image of “wreck” symbolizes the buried female history in the patriarchal society. Alternatively, the wreck represents the past, especially the women’s literary past in which the female voice is silenced by the male’s discourse. Only the wreck submerged at the bottom of the sea can be protected from any intervention and discursive construction on the male’s part. As a result, it can “[preserve] traces of past trauma that can only be inspected, acknowledged, and laboriously brought to light, never revised or effaced” (Gilbert 145). Thus, the narrator’s action of “diving into the wreck” is the symbolic action of exploring the female history and recovering the female voice in the literary past. In order to read history and acquire the capacity to act in history, she must reach the buried parts of personal life and find the truth behind the myth so as to break the hold of those myths over female’s life as

收稿日期:2012-05-08 修回日期:2012-06-20

作者简介:李月宝(1988-),女,福建泉州人,厦门大学外文学院在读硕士研究生,研究方向为英美文学。

well as the male literary tradition over the female under patriarchy.

However, unlike the male explorer Cousteau who is assisted by "his assiduous team", the female narrator starts the journey of exploring the unknown female history alone, only bringing "the book of myths", "camera" and knife with herself (207). This shows the narrator's determination of being self-reliant. "The book of myths" is "all that has been passed on to [people] of the lives of women of other times and cultures" (Stein 127). It probably implies the mystified relationship between men and women in which the voice of women is elided; the myths here may be the so-called "truth" that the male made up in the past to explain such a relationship and to justify the existing patriarchal ideologies. The old myths are invalid and crippling for women to some degree. So, taking "clues from the omissions, as much as from the constantly reiterated truths, [the female explorer goes] back to the wreck" (Stein 127). But why does she bring only "camera" and knife? The camera here, on the one hand, can record the reality; on the other hand, it may symbolize the male gaze under which the female are othered and marginalized, so if women have control over camera, they can master the angle of observation as well as the perspective of representing things. Thus, with the camera in hand the narrator can give a truthful account of what she sees in the wreck without any distortion of the truth. The knife here can have two implications. One function of the knife is to protect the narrator from any harm under water. More importantly, the knife can be interpreted as a tool for her to open a new world during the diving process, just like the male character Cruso in *Foe* who uses the only tool he has—the knife—to cultivate his own kingdom out of the desert island step by step after the shipwreck.

"Critical of the existing cultural 'book of myths'" (DuPlessis 214) and with the simple tools, the narrator sets out to explore the silenced female history in the depths of the ocean and to create a new truth. She goes down the ladder "rung by rung". The "ladder" indicates the different developmental stages of the patriarchal society, so the narrator's action of going down to the bottom implies that she is revealing the invisible cloak of the gradation of society and getting to the true reality. The ladder seems to be "always there / hanging innocently" (Rich 207–208), so the narrator's going down is a process from the innocence to the acquisition of knowledge of the more complex aspect of reality which is also the awakening process of the female voice in history. During the exploration, the explorer should figure out the surrounding ocean by herself, as she states in stanza 3, "there is no one / to tell me when the ocean / will begin." (208) Here, the modal verb "will" is of great significance. Why does the narrator use the future tense "will" instead of the past tense when describing the beginning of the ocean? This future tense suggests that the story of the ocean will be renewed by her exploration. She believes in the existence of "another story" of the sea, which indicates that the silenced female history and voice can be revived through efforts. To revive the true history, the narrator has to "learn alone / to turn [her] body without force / in the deep element" (208). Despite the hostile element, she boldly dives into the sea to inspect the wreck, for she believes the patriarchal power that masters and subjugates the surrounding environ-

ment does not exist under the sea, as she says in stanza 4, "the sea is not a question of power" (208).

Then, how can a woman, especially a female writer, rediscover the history of the past if the history is dominated by the male voice in the patriarchal society? It is in stanza 6 and 7 that the narrator gives the answer: to "[move] to the absolute unembellished truth" (DuPlessis 214), as the explorer herself declares, "the things I came for: / the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth" (209). The narrator's exploration is an active quest with willfulness and purposeful movement. She disregards the existing "words", because the words have always been abused for the male's "purposes" and have become "maps" to selectively represent the world according to the male's needs. Thus, words here are unreliable since they convey the patriarchal discourse and power. What the narrator considers more reliable is the wreck itself, so she openly resists the established stories, myths and claims of the patriarchal ideologies and constructs the female history by relying only on things themselves. Even if the evidence of the damage of the wreck is worn by salt and time, she will still assert her voice, as she says in stanza 7: "the ribs of the disaster/curving their assertion / among the tentative haunters." (209) However difficult the quest is, she will still make every effort to recover the female history through the old wreck.

So how does the narrator feel when she eventually reaches the wreck? Around the wreck which bears witness to damage and disaster, she finds the corpses of her fellowmen: the mermaid and the merman; yet immediately she identifies with the mermaid and the merman: "We circle silently / about the wreck/ we dive into the hold / I am she: I am he." (209–210) Men and women are integrated into one—the androgynous human being. Confronted with the long-held binary opposition of male and female, the narrator regards the androgyny as the ideal state of the harmonic relationship between men and women. The progression in pronoun from "I" to "she", "he" and finally to "we" makes the narrator's voice become more collective and representative and the process of identification is a process from the personal to the collective. By taking the further step of extending the individual to the whole society, the narrator gets the sense of group belonging and the historical thinking transcending time and space.

Therefore, when coming to the final stanza, she advocates, "we are, I am, you are/by cowardice or courage/the one who find our way/back to this scene." (210) Here, she is encouraging everyone to seek anew the past by advocating that human beings should combine together as a collectivity to find and give the new voice. By recommending this, the narrator's quest for the female history reaches a new height rising from the micro level to the macro level, which makes the quest more profound and revolutionary. But why does the narrator use two antonyms: "cowardice" and "courage"? There seems to be some contradiction here and there are many possibilities. Maybe the two antonyms refer to people's different personalities in the collectivity. Maybe they imply the different attitudes towards the existing history or the established past before the quest. Or they refer to the contradictory responses to the forthcoming new history during the quest. Despite the multi-layer implica-

tions of the antonyms, by acknowledging their separateness and differences, what the narrator actually wants to emphasize is that everyone should be encouraged to converge and set out to explore the history and to cultivate a compatible society as well as a collective literature.

By diving into the wreck steadily and denying the validity of traditional myths, the female voice in the poem is liberated gradually step by step. The female narrator finally finds out that part of the truth of the wreck is the “multiple, androgynous, unifying identities” for both men and women (DuPlessis 214) and the only way out for the female is to cultivate the collectivity with the male by joint efforts. When compared with the liberation of the female voice in *Foe*, a lot of similarities can be found. Coetzee’s *Foe* tells a story about how Susan Barton, a female castaway, challenges two men, Cruso and Foe. She makes her voice heard by standing up against the patriarchal authority, striving to tell her own history and truth and seeking to reproduce the colonized other’s voice. Like the female narrator in “Diving into the Wreck”, Susan herself is aware of the lack of female history and such kind of history of elision can be traced “through the major cultural documents of masculine time—the Bible, the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and so on”, as is pointed out by Morgan (82). In *Foe*, she tells Young Susan, “You are father-born. You have no mother. The pain you feel is the pain of lack, not the pain of loss.” (Coetzee 91) Thus, she tries to “be the father of the story and fathers her own text” (126). The absence of female history drives Susan to have a contest for authorship with Foe and to write down what she has experienced on the island. She attempts to “reconstruct the lost or suppressed records of female experience” and to “challenge representations of women in literature as ‘Other’, as ‘lack’” ((Barry 122 and 134). In the process of pursuit, Cruso and Foe’s superior position in the discourse power structure of the patriarchal society is weakened and the oppressed female’s voice is activated by Susan.

To sum up, both the narrators in the two works try to overthrow the established patriarchal ideologies and to reproduce their female history, especially the history of women literature. However, there are some subtle differences between them. The poem, in the end, universalizes the quest for history and voice by orienting the liberation of the female voice toward the whole society, while the novel does not. And, there is another significant contrast in the ending of the two works. At the end of the novel, the dead body of Susan Barton is found in the wreck after an anonymous person dives into the ocean. The dead body seems to symbolize Susan Barton’s quest for the female voice is futile. But in the poem, it is the narrator’s initiative action of diving into the wreck to search the past, so the diving process becomes the process of the female individual’s digging into the female history and wakening the dormant self. The poem ends with “a book of myths/in which/our names do not appear” (210), which is really thought-evoking. Why do their names not appear in the book? There exists some ambiguity. Do they dis-

perse with the “myths” or do they invent new “myths” for book? Indeed, the dispersion of the old myths and the creation of the new “myths” can take place synchronously. It tells that the female history is symbolically eliminated in the past because of the silenced female voice in the patriarchal society. It also indicates that in the future the female, together with the male, will produce the joint voice. And, their collective voice instead of the individual voice will echo in the book.

In conclusion, with a willed descent undertaken in the face of enormous difficulties to recover the female history, this female voice is gradually yet thoroughly liberated in the process of exploration. By rejecting the mythic mode entirely, the female narrator in “Diving into the Wreck” finally recovers the true source of the female history, attains the female autonomy and further claims the collective history and literature. This poem emboldens us to start our own quest for true knowledge and renews our sense that things can be otherwise. Through the assertiveness of the poem, it can be seen that “the accessibility of raw historical fact thus seems not to be in question for Rich.” (Gilbert 151) Moreover, with the assistance of a reading of Coetzee’s *Foe*, it is noticeable that the two female narrators have different fates in the end, which sets us thinking: what indeed is the effective way for the female to reproduce their own history? If women really want to explore their past and reproduce their own female history, especially the literary history, then where is the root of their history and how should they go in the future? These are all the questions that need to be resolved in the process of quest.

## References:

- [1] Rich, Adrienne. *Diving into the Wreck: Selected Readings in American Poetry* [Z]. Tao Jie, ed. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2008.
- [2] Stein, Sondra. *Diving into the Wreck: A History of Our Own* [J]. *Feminist Studies*, 1978, 4(3): 127–139.
- [3] Gilbert, Roger. *Framing Water: Historical Knowledge in Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich* [J]. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 1997, 43(2): 144–161.
- [4] DuPlessis, Blau R. *The Critique of Consciousness and Myth in Levertov, Rich and Rukeyser* [J]. *Feminist Studies*, 1975, 3(1/2): 199–221.
- [5] Morgan, Peter E. *Foe’s Defoe and La Jeune Née: Establishing a Metaphorical Referent for the Elided Female Voice* [J]. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 1994, 35(2): 81–85.
- [6] Coetzee J M. *Foe* [M]. London: Secker & Warburg, 1986.
- [7] Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* [M]. UK: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- [8] Macaskill, Brian, Colleran J. *Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J M Coetzee’s Foe*. *Contemporary Literature*, 1992, 33(3): 432–457.