

Analysis of the Female Characters in "Blood Goddess" from the Perspective of Lacan's Mirror Theory

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Abstract: Written and directed by Yazhe Yang, the Taiwanese film "Blood Goddess" won the Best Feature Film Award at the 54th Taiwan Film Golden Horse Awards. The film tells the story of the heroine, Tang Zhen, who, after experiencing various subversive blows and self-alienation in the fierce battle of politicians under the dark 1980s, eventually transforms into a new generation of ruthless "Mrs. Tang. After experiencing various subversive blows and self-alienation, she finally transforms into a new generation of ruthless "Mrs. Tang" and realizes the real subject pursuit. This paper uses French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's core theory - mirror theory - to start the analysis, discussing how the protagonist Tang really grows from an "angel" to a "demon" step by step, thus making a deeper understanding of the film.

Keywords: The Blood Goddess, Lacan, Mirror Theory, The Other.

1. Introduction

At the 54th Golden Horse Awards ceremony, the film "Blood Goddess", written and directed by director Yazhe Yang, won the Best Feature Film Award, as well as the Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress awards. The film depicts the intricacies of the business and political game in the 1980s and 1990s in the context of Taiwan, with the film revolving around the dark and obscure story of the Tang family, made up of three female protagonists. Among them, Mrs. Tang (Tang She Yue Ying), with her superlative means, shuttles in the real estate battle of "Xiushan Lishui", seemingly a pawn in the hands of her lover, but she becomes the biggest winner of the whole game. The second daughter, Tang Ning, after being used by Mrs. Tang time and again, tries to escape from her control under the patriarchal ethics, and is brutally killed when she tries to escape; the younger daughter, Tang Zhen, who has a dual identity, is an innocent and harmless "angel" on the surface, but eventually achieves independence under the constant alternation of self and pseudo-self, and becomes the new "Mrs. Tang".

2. A Brief Description of the "Mirror Theory"

Jacques Lacan, one of the most famous French psychoanalysts after the Second World War, proposed his famous "Mirror Theory", which is based on the theories of Hegel, Saussure, Freud, and other bachelors, and is a subversion and innovation. "The Mirror Theory" describes the behavior and mental activity of an infant between 6 and 18 months of age in front of a mirror in order to interpret the self-deceptive constructs of the human being in the process of self-awareness. "The infant in front of the mirror does not stop moving because he recognizes himself in the mirror; on the contrary, he tries to conform to the image in the mirror." [1] The infant at this stage is still immersed in the joy of seeing the "I" for the first time, which also means that the infant's self-awareness has not yet been formed, but mistakes the image in the mirror for the real "I". According to Jane Gallop, there is no "self" before the mirror stage since the "self" must

be a totalized, unified idea - a distinction between an inside and an exterior.[2] Although the infant's perception of "I" is intrinsically biased, the infant begins to develop a concept of "I," even if it is a completely self-deceptive process. The infant begins to make great efforts to escape the state of unconsciousness and to acquire the experience of the subject. Lacan calls this process "an identification" of the infant in front of the mirror. When the infant begins to reach out and touch the mirror, he or she discovers that the "I" that he or she had misidentified does not exist, and by the time the infant realizes this, the opposition between the mirror and the self already exists, and the alienation of the self is achieved. This stage, known as the mirror stage, is the main part of Lacan's mirror theory and makes a great transition from the "imaginary" to the "symbolic" world, and the infant's sense of self becomes clearer. In fact, the mirror image also brings with it the bullying and narcissism of the infant subject, which comes from the infant's inability to get the complete satisfaction of desire for the misidentified "I" in the mirror image, and this desire will be forever scarce. The "bullying of the subject" is formed. At this point, the role of the other (the lowercase of "O", refers to the little other) is already evident: the infant's fragmented perception has been explicitly self-realized. As for the end of the mirror phase, it is the application of language. "In the mirror stage, the infant mistakes the other for itself, which once again discredits the already vapid subject, and when the individual subject matures and enters society, the linguistic sign, the capital other, appears." [3] Lacan believes that at this stage the infant has fully realized the process of crossing over from the imaginary to the symbolic world. A more noteworthy change is the shift from the influence of the other (mother, friends, water, etc.) to the Other (the uppercase of "O", refers to the big other) (the linguistic constraints of patriarchal discourse). At the same time, there is a permanent reciprocal relationship between this Other and the subject, who cannot exist independently of the Other. "The subjectivity of the 'I' is fully established, i.e., it is able to express the thing of desire through language."

Thus, the formation of the subject as explained in the mirror theory can be simply considered as two stages: the

alienation brought about by the misidentification of the "I" and the "symbolic world" (patriarchal authority), which is caused by the "other".

3. Interpretation of "Blood Goddess" by "Mirror Theory"

3.1. The Opposition of Mirror and Subject - The Little Other Under Double Misidentification

In the mirror theory, Lacan defines the infant's touching the mirror and finally realizing the duality of mirror and subject as a key part (mirror stage). This important process cannot be achieved without the bullying that the mirror imposes on the subject. In other words, this mirror image can also be called "the little other". In the film, the protagonist, Tang Zhen's best friend Lin Pianpian, is the "mirror" relationship in Lacan's theory. The two of them are the perfect conditions to achieve this criterion in terms of age, mind, and life background. The one who breaks this balance and realizes the dichotomy of the mirror subject is also Lin Pianpian, a little other. At the beginning of the film, when Tang Zhen spies her "sister" Tang Ning in the back garden of the house and accidentally breaks the statue of the Goddess of Mercy, which is to be dedicated to her, Lin looks at her in a teasing manner. After they returned to the Japanese-style house, Tang Zhen made a mistake when making tea and pouring water for President Lin's family, but Lin made it a laughing stock, and intentionally exposed Tang Zhen's peeking at Tang Ning's pleasure during the conversation. These intentional taunts and sarcastic remarks continue to divide Tang Zhen's ideal mirror image from her own body, and her antagonism becomes more and more pronounced as she begins to search for the real "I". However, the most crucial transformation occurs when Marco and Lin Pianpian flirt with each other and mock Tang Zhen. Tang Zhen's desire to fall in love, her feelings for Marco and her growing jealousy towards Lin lead her to become more and more independent from her "mirror image" Lin Pianpian, and her love for Marco turns into her fantasy of dancing in the rain. Tang Zhen's "daydream" fantasy originates from the sexual desire driven by her subconscious, and her powerful instincts release the fantasy to satisfy herself. [4] This is the manifest dichotomy caused by the desire gap mentioned by Lacan in his theory, and it is only then that the subject gradually withdraws from the misidentification. When Tang Zhen intensifies her awareness of her strong negative emotions towards her "mirror image" Lin Pianpian, the subject makes a choice and begins to divest herself of the connection between the two, and her sense of self gradually becomes clearer. This is reflected in the fact that when Lin was hospitalized after the murder of the councilor's family, on the surface, Tang Zhen kindly took care of Lin in bed, but at this time, she deliberately read her diary to Lin, firstly to satisfy her own masturbatory thoughts, and secondly because she wanted Lin to experience the feeling of being shamed. Driven by jealousy and desire, when the forbidden fruit of Satan rolled down at her feet, Tang Zhen decided to pull out the oxygen tube used for Lin's life, and indifferently watched her "mirror image" die, and Tang Zhen's self-consciousness was withdrawn, which also meant that she completely separated herself from her pseudo-self and got rid of her past self, gradually transforming into the real. This also means that she has completely separated from her ego and pseudo-ego, got

rid of her past self, and gradually transformed into the real "Tang Zhen".

In addition, when Mrs. Wang, the dean of the family, laughs and says "a family of three", and Tang Ning is forced to admit her role as a mother, Tang Zhen's ethical concept is torn apart, and the so-called kinship is no longer kinship, but a pawn in a game. The moment she jumps off the train, she also completes the break from the world of imagination to the world of symbols, all the betrayal and disillusionment makes her more and more aware of the collapse of the ideal world. "The emptiness of desire itself is precisely the endless internal drive of the subject to desire forever, but the emptiness of desire itself turns desire into a huge vortex in which the subject constantly desires the other in search of satisfaction, only to sink deeper and deeper." [5] The alienation of the self is completed here, and Tang Zhen moves from rebellion to rebirth.

3.2. The Abstraction and Limitation of The Subject by Language ---- The Big Other That Is Hard to Get Rid of

"The Big Other is the symbolic order, the energy chain, the 'field of speech,' and the laws, norms, and customs built on language. Once the symbolic order emerges, all things, including unintentional knowledge and human subjectivity, are established, and prescribed according to the rules of the symbolic order." [6] In Lacan's view, "the structure and rules of language are patriarchal". [7] The "father" here is not the objective concept of "father", but represents an unshakeable patriarchal discursive authority, which can be understood as a social rule under the male gaze. In this context, the "self" begins to try to merge with the "other", so much so that it cannot be separated. In "Blood Goddess", the background of the story is based on the special ethical structure of the Tang family: a fatherless and husbandless family.

In this case, Mrs. Tang, as the widow of General Tang, plays the role of the new "head of the family", and the originally male physiological authority is transformed into an absolute authority with Mrs. Tang as the core, and the patriarchal authority of the Tang family has completely collapsed in this context (there is no "castration fear"). Even so, the male visionary gaze that really exists in the darkness of the film never disappears. When Madame Tang, Tang Zhen and other senior government officials discuss the "Xiushan Lishui" project, the dirty talk is always in front of the statue of General Tang, showing that patriarchal power will only be diluted or inherited, but never disappear; Madame Tang will buy and kill people for profit, buy people's hearts and mind control, which are unimaginable things a tender-hearted woman would do. These are things that are unimaginable for a soft-hearted woman to do but happen to the superficially gentle and elegant Mrs. Tang, whose feminine nature is weakened and replaced by the reappearance of patriarchal power. Under the judgment of Mrs. Tang's patriarchal aesthetics, both the "demoness" Tang Ning and the "angel" Tang Zhen are targeted, and when they are placed under such a grand portrayal of men, they have only two ways to go: to perish or to conform. Obviously, Tang Zhen chooses the latter. When she gains partial self-awareness under the continuous bullying and stimulation of the other, she decides to get rid of the "angelic look" after her illusion is shattered, and finally stands in the male vision like Mrs. Tang. At the end of the film, when the fruit of Satan comes to Tang Zhen again, she offers Mrs. Tang the most vicious curse - long life and prosperity. At

this moment, she has completely become "Mrs. Tang", a miserable product of patriarchy, her self-consciousness has been completely detached from the mirror image, and her subjectification has been completed, only that this subject will never be free from the control of the Other, the patriarchal discourse.

4. Conclusion

The subject under the mirror rule not only has to experience the dichotomy after being bullied in the way of gaining self-awareness, but the mastery under the patriarchal discourse of the Other is also essential. The psychological transformation of Tang Zhen's distorted style cannot be facilitated by the other. From submissive to sinister, from angelic to demonic, all stimuli that help the subject to dissociate seem to be logical. This is both forced by the environment and the constraints of social rules.

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