

From the Periphery to the Center: Interpreting the Prostitute Images in Yan Ge Ling's Novel *The Flowers of War* with Jung's Archetype Theory

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Abstract: As a prominent Chinese female writer active on the world stage, Yan Ge Ling has consistently demonstrated her *female writing* style through her novel *The Flowers Of War*, which revolves around the Nanjing Massacre and features a portrayal of prostitutes as the main characters. *The Flowers Of War* adopts a unique perspective from a special group, employing its splendid audio-visual techniques to portray the brutal memories of that war. In the academic sphere, there has been some debate about whether this novel and its adaptation into a film embody feminist themes. This paper utilizes Jungian psychoanalysis and the theory of archetypes to elucidate the process of individuation for the prostitute characters in the text and analyze their significance in conveying the author's feminist themes. Ultimately, the paper addresses the points of contention surrounding this issue.

Keywords: Yan Ge Ling, Feminism, Jung, Individuation, Archetype

1. Introduction

Yan Geling born in 1958, is a Chinese female writer who came into the world shortly after the establishment of New China. She grew up in China, served as a female soldier, experienced the tumultuous Cultural Revolution (a highly significant political movement in China), worked as a war correspondent, and later moved to the United States where she pursued studies in literature. She has had two marriages, lived in Africa for a period, and currently resides in Germany. This diverse range of experiences has made her both an active and passive observer of many civilizations. Additionally, being the daughter of a painter, she candidly admits, "(influenced by my father) my thinking is very visual, and my mind is always filled with numerous images flashing constantly." [1]. Her ever-changing and unique life environment has given her a varied and extraordinary life experience. Coupled with her sensitive emotions and abundant talent, Yan Ge Ling has become one of the most influential contemporary Chinese-language writers in North America.

She explores humanity and life from a sensitive and delicate female perspective, focusing on individuals within the collective, the collision of different cultural identities, and the contradictions and communication beneath different gender symbols. Critic Radar commented, "Yan Ge Ling's works are the most sophisticated in recent years. The charm of her narrative lies in its 'instantaneous capacity and concentration.' Her novels possess an expansive force, filled with senses of smell, hearing, vision, and heightened sensitivity." [2].

Yan Ge Ling's novel *The Flowers of War*, centered around the Nanjing Massacre, was not written by chance. She firmly believes it is a work that "must be written" [2]. During a commemorative event in the United States dedicated to remembering the Nanjing Massacre, Yan Ge Ling encountered a person who was crucial to her creation of *The Flowers of War* - Chinese-American writer Zhang Chunru. Born in 1968 in New Jersey, USA, Zhang Chunru had previously worked as a journalist for the Chicago Forum Newspaper. In 1997, she personally conducted an investigation into historical records related to the Nanjing Massacre during her visit to Nanjing.

Yan Ge Ling met Zhang Chunru twice during these events. The first time, Zhang mentioned that she was preparing to write a book titled "The Forgotten Holocaust: The Nanjing Massacre," and the second time they met, she stated that the book was almost complete. However, seven years after the publication of "The Forgotten Holocaust: The Nanjing Massacre," Zhang Chunru passed away in her car in California.

Yan Ge Ling said, "Zhang Chunru's documentary book 'The Forgotten Holocaust: The Nanjing Massacre' inspired my work. It provided me with a profound and macroscopic understanding of the evolution from Japan's warrior spirit to the Nanjing Massacre, and offered significant assistance in writing *The Flowers of War*."

Also, the deep connection between Yan Ge Ling and the Nanjing Massacre, the most significant trauma in China's modern history, stems from having family members who were witnesses to the atrocity. Through her literary works, particularly in non-fiction literature, she aims to make the Japanese nation acknowledge this historical event [3].

Yan Ge Ling is an unwavering feminist, shaped by her gender identity and her continuous portrayal of "marginalized women." She calls this form of writing "feminine writing," which encompasses suffering, forgiveness, and the willingness to confront self-destruction, representing the highest level of femininity [4].

During her time living in the United States, Yan Ge Ling came across Jung's collective unconscious theory through her involvement in psychological counseling, which sparked her immense interest [5]. Her work "Ren Huan" ("Human Realm") specifically indicates her creative process revolving around the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung. Therefore, it can be said that her application of Jung's collective unconscious theory in her texts has a discernible path.

In conclusion, this paper will employ Jung's archetype theory (a more refined concept within Jung's collective unconscious theory) to interpret the portrayal of prostitute images in *The Flowers of War*. However, before delving into the analysis, a review and definition of previous research and the methodology used in this paper are necessary.

2. Literature Review

The Flowers of War is a story set against the backdrop of the Nanjing Massacre [6]. Thirteen prostitutes seek refuge in a sacred church, as during the war, churches presided over by American priests are considered safe zones. However, the thirteen female students living in the church look down upon the prostitutes, leading to many conflicts. The turning point occurs when Japanese officers discover them and demand the students to sing hymns for their soldiers, but their true intention is to assault them. Despite the priest's attempt to intervene, the students contemplate suicide to avoid violation. Unbeknownst to the Japanese, the prostitutes have been living in the cellar and decide to bravely take the students' place, facing death. Among the thirteen prostitutes, Yu Mo, the leader, is the most prominent and deeply portrayed character in the novel, and the entire story revolves around the experiences of these women.

The peak of academic research on *The Flowers of War* occurred around 2012. This was likely due to the fact that in that year, the renowned Chinese director Zhang Yimou adapted the novel into a movie, bringing it to the big screen. Given its highly sensitive topic of the Nanjing Massacre, Chinese

scholars unsurprisingly focused their attention on the national significance of the novel, viewing it as a positive portrayal of the deep-seated wounds in China's national memory [7].

Subsequently, scholars further elevated the discussion to encompass the universal human values depicted in the novel, and they praised it as a reconstruction of collective memory about the calamity of human nature, one that transcends national suffering and represents the humanity shared by all [8]. They believed that the novel aimed to explore the essence of "evil" itself and the illumination of humanity within the ravages of evil, focusing on human nature while downplaying the emphasis on nationality [9]. Many scholars unanimously referred to the concept of "redemption," signifying the courageous act of the prostitutes stepping forward to replace the female students and facing death. In the context of the nation, the surviving female students became symbols of hope. Regarding human nature, the sacrifice of these individuals amid the "bestiality" of the massacre represents the eternal presence of benevolent human nature unaffected by its alienation. At the level of women, the reconciliation between the female students and prostitutes signifies redemption, as does the internal self-redemption among women. From the perspective of the latter, this reflects feminism.

2.1. Feminist Literary Criticism and *The Flowers of War*

Feminism is a political advocacy that primarily draws from women's experiences and motivations, aiming to combat gender discrimination, elevate women's status, and achieve gender equality. Using a feminist perspective in literary criticism serves the purpose of "analyzing women writers and their writings from a female perspective" and "interpreting the symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view" [10]. Some scholars argue that Yan Ge Ling portrays the prostitutes in the novel as "perfect women," emphasizing the transcendence of marginalized women's humanity [11]. Others believe she employs "bodily rhetoric," using the female body as a symbol and metaphor for rape and gang rape, as a means to awaken collective memories of the "Nanjing Massacre" in modern Chinese people [12]. They all agree that Yan Ge Ling's work is significantly influenced by feminism, exploring the power of women and their agency in history.

However, some critics argue that the novel still carries some traditional male-focused views, especially evident in its movie adaptation. They acknowledge that the "noises, glamour, seduction, and emotions of women" become the objects of observation, treating the story as a spectacle of gender adventure for women in peril [9]. Some even criticize the choice of prostitutes as the central characters in a story revolving around the Nanjing Massacre, as a nostalgic longing and yearning for the flourishing world of prostitutes in a male-dominated consciousness [12]. In summary, the significant involvement of prostitute images in the text has sparked debates and discussions.

2.2. Jung's Archetype Theory and Feminist Literary Criticism in *The Flowers of War*

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a renowned Swiss psychologist and the founder of analytical psychology. He proposed that the human psyche consists of both the conscious and unconscious parts, with the individual's unconscious shaped by factors like childhood experiences. In contrast to the concept of the personal unconscious, "The contents of the collective unconscious are archetypes, primordial images that reflect basic patterns or common to us all, and which have existed universally since the dawn of time" [13]. The collective unconscious is not specific to any particular culture but rather represents a psychological space shared by all human beings, while cultural traits of different ethnic groups and civilizations are the manifestations of the collective unconscious. In other words, the essence of various human civilizations lies within the collective unconscious, which is comprised of archetypes.

According to Jung [13], the archetype is something that is recognized and named in other fields of knowledge. Jung classified archetypes as persona (one's social mask), shadow (one's dark or evil side), anima/animus (one's heterogendered aspect), and the most important one, the Self.

"The Self represents the integrated fully developed person, consisting of mature wisdom, generosity, and total consciousness" [14]. Individuation (self-realization) is the process of achieving the Self. In this process, the unconscious parts of the personality (persona, shadow, anima, and animus) transform into the conscious parts, leading to the realization of a fully conscious individual. In this process, the personality undergoes a transformation from humanity to divinity as it integrates consciousness and unconsciousness.

Apart from the Self, anima and animus are the two main archetypes in Jungian analytical psychology, representing the opposite-sex characteristics within the psyche of men and women. Anima refers to the feminine tendencies in the male subconscious mind, while animus represents the masculine tendencies in the female subconscious mind. Regardless of whether people acknowledge it or not, everyone possesses certain opposite-sex characteristics in their unconscious depths. Through centuries of shared living and interactions, both men and women have acquired characteristics of the opposite sex, which ensure harmony and understanding between the genders. Jung believed that men and women have fundamentally different social and biological destinies. He assumed that because men and women are shaped by the male and female archetypes, respectively, one person perfectly represents the complementary opposite of the other. Despite their distinct characteristics, women and men have equally valuable roles.

It can be understood that the opposite-sex characteristics in the individual's unconscious space are ever-present. Through the process of individuation, the personality can integrate the opposite-sex characteristics in the unconscious space, and the Self represents a complete self with both masculine and feminine traits. In other words, women are not subordinate to men in a patriarchal sense but are equal individuals with different qualities. In the process of self-realization, women can also "realize" masculine traits such as logic, independence, and objectivity, while men can recognize feminine traits such as eros, dependence, and subjectivity [15].

Jung's archetype theory has contributed to the development of cultural feminism and feminist archetype theory. The objective of feminist archetype theory is to reevaluate the value of women and liberate female archetypes from cultural male biases [16]. Within the context of archetypal and goddess psychology [15], Jung consistently emphasized that the feminine principle has been historically devalued. Feminists who adopt the "Jungian principle" are dedicated to identifying archetypes in texts (literature, dreams, myths) that align with feminism, representing authentic women rather than serving as mere reflections of patriarchal civilization.

Prostitutes have been a classic symbol in world culture, from Mary Magdalene in Christianity to Maupassant's "Ball of Fat," from ancient Chinese prostitute poems to Yan Ge Ling's *The Flowers Of War*. Regardless of whether viewed from a male or female perspective, the prostitute figure remains a subject that writers enthusiastically explore and create.

The feminist portrayal of prostitute characters aims to break free from the patriarchal gaze, supplement the discourse space traditionally shaped by men, rebel against patriarchal discourses and norms, deconstruct the cultural implications of the "prostitute" image, and develop a unique interpretation from the perspective of women. This process helps construct a distinct female discourse system.

Yan Ge Ling describes her commitment to placing her characters in "extraordinary environments," providing them with ample space to fully unfold and revealing their "deepest, unfathomable secrets" through unexpected actions within specific settings [17]. These "deepest, unfathomable secrets" are rooted in the collective unconscious of humanity. In *The Flowers of War*, she places the thirteen prostitutes in an extreme environment of the massacre, confined to a narrow and enclosed scene (the

church cellar), undoubtedly embodying this belief. In her essay collection, she mentions that she began exploring Jung's psychological works when she came to the United States in the 1990s. Scholars argue that "Jung's collective unconscious theory has helped Yan Ge Ling delve deeper into the exploration of the human psyche" [5].

2.3. Research Gap

However, interpreting Yan Ge Ling's novel through Jung's theory remains relatively unexplored in academic circles. Although some attempts have been made to connect Jung and Yan Ge Ling's novel interpretations, they have only scratched the surface. While many have discussed the growth of the prostitute characters in *The Flowers of War*, they have rarely linked it to Jung's concept of individuation. Moreover, people have recognized the recurring role of prostitutes in Yan Ge Ling's works and their symbolic significance—writing their stories essentially means writing about the subjectivity of women. However, these discussions lack a more theoretical foundation. Some feminists have argued that "theorizing was oppressive to women and sought chiefly to consolidate male power" [18]. Yet, applying Jung's archetype theory to interpret the prostitute images in "The Flowers of War" can provide a better explanation of Yan Ge Ling's feminist perspective on these characters and respond to previous debates. Therefore, it is essential to use Jung's theory to expound on the individuation process of the prostitute characters and the specific archetypes they represent, as well as their significance to the feminist themes in the novel.

3. Research Methodology

In summary, this paper aims to address the following issues:

- a) ·How does the portrayal of the prostitute characters in *The Flowers Of War* achieve the process of individuation?
- b) ·What specific archetypes do these thirteen prostitutes represent in the text?
- c) ·Through the depiction of the prostitute characters, what purpose does the author achieve?

This study primarily adopts a literature analysis approach. Extensive literature searches were conducted on academic platforms such as China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Taylor & Francis, Google Scholar, and others. Relevant journals and papers were extensively reviewed, and selected literature was categorized and synthesized. The research focuses on the feminist themes and portrayal of prostitute characters in *The Flowers of War*, conducting in-depth reflection on the work's content, proposing a re-interpretation using Jungian theory, and drawing conclusions based on research findings.

Through in-depth analysis of the selected literature, this study explores the roles and significance of the prostitute characters in the context of the Nanjing Massacre from a feminist perspective. Through a comprehensive analysis of their actions and experiences, the study reveals the cultural and social implications of these characters' narratives and affirms the author's "female writing" purpose and its impact on the emancipation of real women, responding to previous debates.

Additionally, this research stands out for its use of Jungian theory to re-interpret the psychological journeys of the prostitute characters. By exploring the anima and animus archetypes within these characters, the study uncovers the underlying depth, motivations, and struggles behind their personas. The application of Jungian theory provides a fresh perspective and enriches the understanding of their individuation process and complexities of identity.

The ultimate goal of this study is to draw profound conclusions based on research findings. Through a comprehensive synthesis of the literature and insights provided by Jungian theory, it presents a comprehensive depiction of the feminist themes and multi-dimensional portrayal of the

prostitute characters in *The Flowers of War*. By delving into the characters' diverse experiences, the research aims to contribute to the study of feminist themes in this literary work.

4. The Individuation of Prostitutes

It is undeniable that Yan Geling intentionally chose "prostitutes" as the protagonists to depict the major historical event of the Nanjing Massacre in China. Prostitutes themselves are a sensitive and multifaceted cultural theme that has been repeatedly written about by world literati. Coincidentally, it is also Yan Geling's specialty in female themes. Yan Geling aims to artistically retell history through the complex stories of prostitutes' backgrounds.

In the beginning of the story, there are actually fourteen prostitutes. They come from the banks of the Qinhuai River in Nanjing (a historically well-known area for sensual transactions in Chinese history, often described by literati as a fixed cultural symbol). In order to escape the fanatical slaughter by the Japanese, they disregard the priest's objections and climb over the church's brick walls, hoping to preserve themselves amidst the war.

Yan Geling did this intentionally. She placed prostitutes, students, priests, and Chinese soldiers in the same narrow, enclosed church. She hoped to explore the possibilities of human nature through this extreme environment. We can also say that she wanted to better showcase the prototypes within the collective unconscious in this extreme environment, showing the process of prostitutes becoming "SELF." There is undoubtedly an individuation process for the prostitutes.

Jung believed that the formation of a person's complete self-awareness roughly consists of five stages:

In the first stage, individuals have no conscious awareness or very little awareness of the boundaries between themselves and the world they inhabit. Their thoughts are entirely based on societal expectations.

The second stage is a long and sometimes painful process of differentiation. People gradually seek their own identity and often do so by contrasting themselves with others through a dialectical principle.

The third stage focuses on discerning moral paradigms, continuously examining the collective ethics of the individual's surroundings in order to form their own ethical guidelines.

The fourth stage begins when individuals realize that all collective norms, expectations, and authorities they've invested in are "projections" created by humans. These projections start to break down, and the world is seen as it truly is, ultimately freeing the individual to become their authentic and unique self. While some might see this stage as the goal of conscious evolution, Jung believed it wasn't, as it strips away all pretenses, leading to a world perceived as completely lacking any certainty, which can quickly result in a sense of discord and alienation from the environment. This is not what consciousness aspires to.

In the fifth stage, individuals consciously question their inner tendencies through a new dialectic. They integrate consciousness and the subconscious to achieve a complete and transcendent personality. This reintegrated personality should harmonize with society, but this harmony should be different from the subjective virtues relied upon in the first stage. These five stages may overlap in the process of conscious development, and the fifth stage represents the completion of individuation, the stage where one becomes aware of the SELF prototype [19].

In the beginning, the prostitutes exemplify the Archetype of the Shadow in a more conscious manner. They aggressively occupy the living space and resources (such as water and food) of the female students, engage in profanity-laden arguments with them, and go to great lengths to seduce priests and soldiers in exchange for sexual favors, hoping to gain more privileges and resources. They are like the darkest and most irredeemable shadows of human nature, unabashedly displaying the ugliness of humanity. Morality and goodness seem to be non-existent, as they selfishly disrupt the families of the female students, seizing the resources the students originally possessed. They also

leave repulsive traces within the sacred church, showing no shame as they sell their bodies, and even take pride in it. This aligns with the first stage of Jung's individuation theory: the prostitutes are merely doing what their societal roles and expectations dictate, without self-awareness, in perfect alignment with societal expectations. They openly and shamelessly embody the inherent evil of human nature.

However, as the plot unfolds, we discover that the prostitutes have a different side to them.

In the midst of war, three Chinese wounded soldiers sought refuge in a church to escape pursuit by Japanese soldiers. There was a 15-year-old prostitute named Doukou who patiently cared for one of the severely injured Chinese soldiers. Doukou played the pipa for him, sang songs, and attentively tended to his emotional needs. However, the wounded soldier ultimately faced death due to the lack of proper medical assistance.

The book describes it as follows: "Doukou paused for a moment, her hands embracing Wang Pusheng. After a while, people noticed her shoulders trembling. It was the first time Doukou cried like a grown-up girl. Originally, it was her incoherent sobbing, but now, she cried quietly with Doukou. Several other women around them began to cry silently." [6].

In this moment of mourning for the wounded soldier, Doukou, as a compassionate fellow human being, as a civilian of the same nationality protected by soldiers, and as a young girl with hopes for the future, wept. She was no longer just a shadow, but revealed a completely different side, even multiple facets, from society's expectations of a prostitute. Doukou's tears prompted other prostitutes to cry as well. At this moment, they were not just shedding tears for themselves; they were beginning to reclaim their identities in human society. This marked the second stage where they no longer entirely adhered to society's expectations as their guiding principles and benchmarks. In other words, they did things that didn't conform to society's fantasies about "prostitutes." They were not as malicious or selfish, and they didn't maintain a numb and indifferent attitude towards all suffering. Instead, they viewed this different aspect of themselves with a dialectical perspective.

There is another description concerning Yumo. The three Chinese soldiers who had been hiding in the church were eventually discovered and mercilessly slaughtered, without exception. The prostitutes and the female students hiding in the underground warehouse listened to the entire ordeal.

"Yumo began to sob softly. She withdrew from the window, clutching a small pair of scissors in one hand while wiping away the tears that flowed uncontrollably down her face with the other. Her hands were covered in thick layers of dust, smudging her features beyond recognition. ...Yumo, accompanied by others like Hongling, had already entered the hall. They busied themselves for several hours, dignifying the deceased by cleansing and dressing them. They even used a razor to shave their faces." [6].

There's an old Chinese poem that talks about prostitutes. In essence, it suggests that even when the nation has fallen, prostitutes continue to sing songs to entertain their clients. This implies that prostitutes lack a sense of national belonging and do not possess that kind of patriotism or love for humanity. They are depicted as numbly earning a living with their bodies. However, in this context, Yumo and the other prostitutes shedding tears clearly defy this stereotype. They felt deep sympathy and respect for the fallen Chinese soldiers, making a contribution to their dignified departure. The hatred for the aggressors surfaced in their hearts, a sentiment that doesn't belong exclusively to prostitutes but to all those victimized by aggression.

The turning point in the third and fourth stages occurred when Japanese officers "invited" thirteen female students to sing for them. Everyone in the church knew that this was an invitation from which there was no return. Thirteen prostitutes, led by Yumo, stepped forward willingly, offering to go in place of the female students to face what they believed would be certain death.

"The prostitutes concealed whatever makeshift weapons they could find: steak knives, fruit knives, hairpins. If luck was on their side, a single hairpin could earn them an enemy's eye." [6].

"As the prostitutes donned the formal attire of a choir, wearing white chiffon blouses and black floor-length dresses, the doorbell rang again. The girls observed that they resembled a group of innocent young girls, each holding a music sheet and a gilded leather-bound Bible, unaware of the harsh realities of the world." [6].

The prostitutes have now completely departed from societal expectations. At this moment, it's as if they suddenly realized the disparities in social identity, forming their own moral consciousness and cognitive guidelines. No one forced them to replace the female students, and the priest and his apprentices did not believe that the prostitutes deserved to die. The priest said, "You came here for refuge." In other words, in the face of life and death, class and identity seemed to have disappeared, but the prostitutes made a decision—they believed it was worthwhile to protect the female students with their lives. Although the text doesn't explicitly state the reasons behind their decision, it can be inferred that, for whatever reasons, they acted based on their own cognitive criteria rather than the societal expectations of prostitutes. This is their manifestation of transitioning into the third stage.

The "female students" serve as a spiritual image for the prostitutes. The prostitutes aspire to become like the female students because, in their subconscious minds and in society's subconscious, female students are considered noble and pure. "When their inner sense of purity and noble dignity is rediscovered, they want to prove to the world that they are not inferior to anyone in matters of affection and morality" [5].

At the same time, the prostitutes increasingly wished to take on the role of an "assassin." Despite lacking weapons, they tried to improvise with whatever materials they could find. This was because they were not the kind of songstresses who remained oblivious to the wounds of their nation even during its downfall. They were also part of the suffering nation, and they hoped to retaliate against the aggressors like soldiers. Their consciousness had long transcended from the first stage of complete alignment with societal expectations to the fourth stage of facing reality as it truly is. They had broken free from the "projection" of the collective norms and expectations, living as their authentic and unique selves.

At this point, the prostitutes had completed the entire process of individuation of their personalities, and their collective personality had grown and matured. The stages of consciousness development are not entirely separate, and the various experiences the prostitutes went through in the extreme environment of the church collided with something mysterious in their subconscious. Perhaps this is what Jungian psychology refers to as the interplay and collision between the "hero archetype" and the "mother archetype" in the unconscious of the prostitutes.

5. Feminist Writing: The Image of Prostitutes as Heroic and Maternal Archetypes

The prostitutes are depicted as heroes who save the female students and as self-sacrificing maternal figures ensuring the continuity of the nation's future generations. Yan Geling, through her portrayal of prostitutes, aims to explore the divinity within human nature. The prostitutes have consistently been influenced by the "female student archetype" in their minds, continually responding to societal expectations placed on the female student identity during their personal development. However, in the end, they reveal a completely new and authentically unique self that is not bound by society's rigid expectations of any identity but is instead connected to the typical archetypes that make up the collective unconscious.

The hero archetype and the mother archetype are exemplified in the literary work through the writer's description of the event where "prostitutes save the female students."

Compared to traditional male heroes, the male supporting characters in this novel centered around a prostitute protagonist appear to be quite powerless. Chinese soldiers, an American priest, a Chinese priest adopted by the American priest, and a Chinese cook - all of them are unable to rescue the female students. They can only serve as weak side characters—they cannot prevent the Japanese soldiers

from violating the female students in the novel, nor can they provide any protection for the female students. Ultimately, the rescue of the female students comes from the lower echelons of society and its dark side—the prostitutes, who are undoubtedly marginalized individuals. This represents self-redemption among women and is a reverse salvation from the lower class to the upper class.

From a Jungian perspective, the "hero archetype" and the "mother archetype" represent "extraordinary virtues such as loyalty, courage, steadfastness, or selfless devotion." The author chooses to express these archetypes through the classic literary figure of prostitutes. The yearning of the prostitutes for the "female students" image reawakens the hero archetype within the collective unconscious to consciousness. They are not only courageous but also compassionate. In the strongly religiously suggestive setting of the church, they are metaphorically depicted as suffering Madonna figures. They sacrifice both their souls and bodies to secure an ideal future for another group of female compatriots. Influenced by archetypes deeply embedded in the human psyche and merging with the mysterious unconscious, the prostitutes, driven by innate human instincts, engage in acts of dedication and sacrifice. This innate human instinct represents the essence of human divinity that the author Yan Geling wants to explore. Ultimately, they become fully conscious embodiments of the hero-mother archetype itself.

The author undoubtedly celebrates the human splendor of prostitutes as marginalized women by portraying their characters. Prostitutes undergo the complete process of individuation, transforming from the Shadow into the Self, within the extreme circumstances they find themselves in. During this process, they perform a self-rescue ritual within themselves as women—substituting themselves for the real female students and carrying out a courageous and heroic sacrifice, embodying the archetypal images of both heroes and mothers. "The Flowers of War" is a distinctly feminist work because all unconscious to conscious transformation, collective personal growth, and redemption occur within the realm of women. It is an epic of female growth in the context of an invasive war. Yan Geling consciously portrays the characters' journey from base humanity to higher divinity to illustrate the process of their self-realization.

6. Conclusion

Therefore, let's reexamine whether this novel genuinely embodies feminist perspectives or if it returns to the traditional narrative under the patriarchal viewpoint. Some may question why the author places such significant emphasis on the portrayal of courtesans – is it merely to cater to certain individuals' erotic fantasies? Or is it to entertain the themes of war from a conventional male perspective, rather than addressing the national wounds in a more serious manner?

However, we can explain this by combining Jung's archetype theory with the narrative of feminist heroism. It seems that the author is emphasizing the unique position of marginalized women in this story; they serve as concrete embodiments of the archetypal saviors of humanity, akin to maternal figures. This is a crucial perspective because it underscores the greatness of these marginalized women in the narrative. They possess the capability to bring salvation, facilitate personal growth, and find redemption within their own femininity.

Therefore, the profound message of this novel extends far beyond the mere satisfaction of erotic fantasies or the trivialization of serious themes. It is a work filled with intricate perspectives and reflections, deeply emphasizing the worth and capabilities of marginalized women and their crucial role in saving humanity. In doing so, it strongly supports the core principles of feminism, which advocate for women to have equal standing in society, recognizing their equivalent abilities and worth alongside men.

The author seems to employ Jung's archetype theory and feminist heroic narratives to infuse the courtesan figures in the story with a deeper, more complex meaning. This is not merely to cater to the desires of those seeking erotic fantasies, nor is it to present the weighty theme of war through a

traditional male perspective. Instead, it underscores the salvational role of marginalized women within the broader human context.

From this perspective, marginalized women are rightfully recognized as formidable and redemptive beings, capable of personal growth and inner redemption within the framework of their female identity. Through explicit gender symbols, the novel cleverly establishes this unique female redemptive value, ultimately advocating for equality.

The point conveyed by this novel is that heroes in a patriarchal perspective aren't always strong males who come to rescue the weak. Instead, the role of the savior, in an elevated position, can equally be played by groups of women, thus promoting the idea of gender equality. This viewpoint, while emphasizing the unique abilities and value of women, also calls for a reevaluation of traditional gender role stereotypes to achieve broader social equality.

It can be said that the author's primary focus on the courtesan character is not to satisfy certain people's erotic fantasies about courtesan figures, nor to trivialize the serious theme of war from a traditional male gaze perspective, but rather to combine Jung's archetype theory with feminist hero narrative. This combination emphasizes the sacred status of marginalized women in the universal act of saving lives. As marginalized women, they are also great and redemptive, capable of personal growth and achieving redemption within the female gender. Establishing this unique redemptive value within explicit gender symbols is, in fact, promoting equality. Because it's saying that in a patriarchal perspective, heroes are always powerful men saving the weak, but similarly, the role of the savior in an elevated position can also be composed of a group of women.

In most cases, the suffering endured by women is often narrated as an alien force. Women are more commonly portrayed as victims of suffering. Their life, death, or their rebirth in the ideological context is often seen as symbolic. These acts of harm or rescue of women are usually determined by men who represent either evil or goodness. Their fate is largely determined by the kind of men they encounter in their environment. As a result, regardless of whether men are good or evil, they hold dominant positions, while women, regardless of their beauty, age, or size, are passively subject to the whims of men. Women seem unable to shape their own destinies but are instead determined by men.

Yan Geling's narrative of women's suffering completely overturns this creative pattern. In her novels, by acknowledging suffering as a part of life and portraying women as saviors themselves, she eliminates the adversarial relationship between women and suffering, as well as between women and men. By affirming the fullness of life through their own sensory experiences and transcending the torment of suffering on human nature in harsh and cruel environments, she passionately celebrates women's lives and conscience. This goes beyond traditional cultural binaries of hierarchy and strength, reaching a social, historical, and cultural level of thought. It possesses a valuable depth that transcends the binary oppositions of traditional culture, elevating the consideration of women's consciousness to a profound level.

Yan Geling's works are not just a literary exploration but also a profound reflection on the complex position of women in society, history, and culture. Her writing presents a distinct feminist viewpoint, emphasizing that women's existence is not merely passive but holds the potential to actively change their destinies and society. Her works represent a unique feminist perspective, highlighting the strength and value of women, as well as their resilience and courage when facing adversity. Her words are not just a literary expression but also a profound contemplation of gender issues in society, providing strong support for women's equal rights and social standing. Through her works, we are inspired to reexamine and redefine the roles and missions of women, striving for a more equitable and inclusive society.

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