

Historical Narrative in Postmodern Literary Horizon: The Study of Graham Swift's Fiction

后现代文学视域中的
历史叙事

——格雷厄姆·斯威夫特小说研究

· 王艳萍 著



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前 言

英国当代著名小说家格雷厄姆·斯威夫特(Graham Swift, 1949—)小说的最大特征是“历史叙事”与“文学叙事”的视域融合。传统的历史叙事属于实证主义史学观范畴,是企图通过考证、分析、归纳来探求客观真实的历史;传统的文学叙事属于文学范畴,是任凭想象力驰骋、虚构、创造的天地,是自给自足,和真实事件没有直接联系的世界。然而,这样泾渭分明的区别在斯威夫特的小说中被彻底地解构了:历史叙事有其想象的一面,文学叙事也有其真实的一面,而二者都是语言建构的产物。

斯威夫特的小说表现出明显的历史认知危机,而这种危机产生的根源就是传统历史叙事观。宏大叙事(grand narrative)是传统历史叙事的根本特征,斯威夫特通过解构宏大叙事和叙说“仿真”的历史动摇了传统历史叙事的本质主义诉求。穿梭于故事与历史之间、历史编纂元小说、互文性是他建构文本化历史的叙事策略。作为一个哲学意识很强的小说家,斯威夫特在他的作品中经常自觉不自觉地流露出回归“心灵历史”、在“心灵历史”中寻找历史的完整性和意义的慎终追远、悲天悯人的人文意识。挖掘其小说中蕴含着的“心灵历史”的意蕴是本研究的重点所在。“心灵历史”具有两个层面的涵义:心灵对过去历史的重建;在重建历史过程中心灵获得感悟和净化。他通过历史叙事和历史诠释来建构“心灵历史”,这使其作品在当代英国历史小说中独树一帜。斯威夫特在当代文学界占有重要地位,而目前国内外尚无一部系统研究其小说历史叙事的著作,更无学者涉足其“心灵历史”领域。鉴于此,本书具有重要的理论意义与实际应用价值。

本书由引言、正文和结束语三部分组成。引言部分概括地介绍斯

威夫特的文学生涯和文学成就、国内外的研究现状及本书的基本结构。正文部分沿着“质疑传统历史叙事—解构宏大叙事—建构文本化历史—回归心灵历史”的思路构成以下四章。第一章探讨斯威夫特如何运用历史认知危机来质疑传统历史叙事。对历史真相的渴望和浮士德式苦苦追寻的精神贯穿其所有小说。斯威夫特从主题和形式两个方面都表明过去历史真相的不可知性和人为建构性。“到底发生了什么？”是其所有小说不变的主题。这种历史认知危机通过“不可靠叙事者”和“反侦探小说题材”这两种叙事形式被表达得淋漓尽致。传统历史叙事一般默认叙事者是可靠的，但斯威夫特用“自我反省式叙事者”和“嵌套式结构(mise-en-abyme)中的叙事者”呈现出叙事者的不可靠性。“嵌套式结构”是一种后现代叙事方式，也被称为“镶嵌式结构”、“叙事内镜”或“纹心结构”，指的是框架叙事(framing narrative)中套着嵌入式叙事(embedded narrative)。《羽毛球》(*Shuttlecock*, 1981)中普兰提斯与其父亲的叙事、《从此以后》(*Ever After*, 1992)中比尔与其先祖的叙事就是这种叙事方式的突出体现。这种叙事方式严重地动摇和削弱了所叙事实的稳定性。传统侦探小说暗含着这样一个意识形态假设：逻辑和理性可以帮助人们摆脱混沌世界、追求秩序与安宁。这种小说往往通过展现一个充满谜团的世界，让一个具有“天才”般推理能力的侦探对各种谜团进行抽丝剥茧的分析，最终解开谜团，将罪犯绳之以法，满足读者的期待。而这些恰恰就是反侦探小说要解构的要素。反侦探小说虽然借用侦探小说的套式，但“它往往勾起侦查的冲动，目的却在于以拒绝揭开谜底的方式粗暴地挫败这种冲动”，即“通过颠倒、压制、遮蔽侦探小说套路中的各种要素(罪案、受害者和侦探)，破坏侦探小说的理性诉求，毁灭侦查的冲动和读者的期待”。本书分析了作者是如何运用反侦探小说题材来质疑历史认知确定性的。斯威夫特之所以强调历史认知危机，是因为他质疑传统的历史叙事观，这一点我们可以从他对宏大叙事的解构中进一步看出。

第二章分析斯威夫特如何在小说中解构宏大叙事，叙说“仿真”的历史(simulated history)。宏大叙事，又称堂皇叙事或大叙事，是法国哲学家利奥塔(Jean-Francois Lyotard, 1924—1998)提出的重要术语。

利奥塔认为后现代就是对宏大叙事的不信任和对宏大叙事手段的拒绝。宏大叙事理论框架以上帝、理性、超验真理、科学等信条为前提,主要有两种表现形式:一种是以德国古典哲学传统为代表的关于思辨真理的“思辨叙事”,一种是以法国启蒙主义传统为代表的关于人性解放的“解放叙事”。宏大叙事是传统历史叙事的根本特征,主张语言能够客观而准确地表征现实和历史;历史发展是线性的、理性的。本章以小说《洼地》(*Waterland*, 1983)为例来分析作者对宏大叙事的解构。在《洼地》中,作者用言说的困境解构了语言的表征功能;用因果律的破碎解构历史的理性发展;用历史的循环发展解构了线性发展;用“历史的终结”论解构了历史发展的目的论。对宏大叙事本质主义的质疑和批判在《世外桃源》(*Out of This World*, 1988)中得到进一步的体现。在这部小说中,斯威夫特利用照片等当代影像媒介来表现历史真实的不可再现及不可复原性。斯威夫特在这方面的探讨暗合了鲍德里亚(Jean Baudrillard, 1929—2007)的观点:“仿真”或“拟像”割裂了图像与历史之间的联系;“仿真”既没有原本,也没有指涉;在无限的复制和繁殖中,原本与复本、真实与虚假之间的界限被彻底消解了,人们生活在一个根本没有固定指涉物的“符码”世界中。本章分别从照片、电视及现实世界这几个方面来探讨作者是如何叙说“仿真”历史的。

第三章阐释斯威夫特的小说是如何融合历史叙事与文学叙事,进而建构文本化历史的。首先论述作者是如何在“文本性”和“人为建构性”层面上,阐明故事与历史密不可分的关系,作者是怎样以犯罪故事为样本向读者解析历史是被编纂出来的,作者又是如何用童话故事、迷信与传言构建历史的。然后,重点运用“历史编纂元小说”(historiographic metafiction)的理论解析斯威夫特的文本化历史观。斯威夫特的四部小说,《洼地》、《羽毛球》、《世外桃源》及《从此以后》明显具有此类小说的特点。“历史编纂元小说”是加拿大著名文学理论家琳达·哈钦(Linda Hutcheon, 1947—)提出的概念,它指的是那些“具有鲜明的自我指涉的特征,同时又悖论式地宣称指涉历史事件和真实的人物”的小说。也就是说,这类小说既具有元小说的特色,又指涉历史。但其小说所指涉的不是本体意义上的历史,而是一个由文本、互文本编

织的历史。斯威夫特认为人不可能找到“原生态”的历史,而只能循着文本踪迹找到关于历史的叙事。本章最后以《洼地》、《从此以后》及《最后的遗嘱》(*Last Orders*, 1996)这三部小说为主,探讨作者是如何利用互文本编织历史的。

第四章解读斯威夫特是如何融贯叙事与诠释来建构“心灵历史”的。以尼采(Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 1844—1900),狄尔泰(Wilhelm Dilthey, 1833—1911)、乔治·柯林武德(George Collingwood, 1889—1943)、海德格尔(Martin Heidegger, 1889—1976)及海登·怀特(Hayden White, 1928—)等历史学家和哲学家的理论为基础,本书从两个方面揭示斯威夫特的“心灵历史”的终极历史观:(1)“心灵对过去重建”的历史:历史不是一个固定的、先验的、形而上学的存在,它伴随着我们的叙事和诠释活动而生成。(2)人的心灵在重建历史的同时也获得了感悟和净化。人在心灵深处渴望权力、爱及意义,渴望建立自我认同感,渴望战胜虚无感,渴望灵魂的升华。通过历史叙事和诠释活动,心灵得到了满足、慰藉、复苏与成长。斯威夫特对“心灵历史”的探索和建构揭示了历史的本质和意义。他通过其小说告诉读者:回归“心灵历史”是一切叙事的意义所在。意大利历史学家贝奈戴托·克罗齐(Benedetto Croce, 1866—1952)说过,“一切历史都是当代史”;英国历史学家科林伍德认为“一切历史都是思想史”。历史是过去事件和人物在当代人心中过滤后的产物,重写历史是为当代人服务的。对斯威夫特来说,能否真实再现过去已然不重要,重要的是叙事过程本身所起到的积极的、“行为的”、“诊疗般的”作用。他认为叙述历史能够使我们正视过去,进而更好地面对现在和未来。首先,本章以《羽毛球》为例,探讨其主人公普兰提斯是如何通过诠释父亲的战争回忆录而获得权力感的,而权力欲望就是人心中深处的本能需要。其次,以《从此以后》为例,分析主人公比尔是如何通过诠释祖先的日记获得自我认同感的。再次,以《洼地》为例,分析叙事何以成为人类抵制虚无、创造意义的手段。最后,以《最后的遗嘱》为例,探讨“历史叙事与灵魂升华”这一主题,阐释主人公的送葬之旅是如何展演为一场“历史与现实相互交织之旅”,一场“灵魂净化与升华之旅”。

结束语部分总结斯威夫特小说中的历史叙事策略,点明本书的研究价值。研究历史最终是为当代人服务的,历史小说的功能尤其如此,这是斯威夫特小说的精髓,也是本书的研究宗旨。在后现代语境中,主体破碎,意义缺席,价值虚无,斯威夫特用他的如椽之笔书写的小说向读者展示了一个全新的认识历史的维度,再现了迷惘的当代人是如何在流动不居的历史语境中思考现实的困境、苦苦寻觅生活的秩序与意义的。作者似乎在告诉人们:无论是历史叙事还是文学叙事,心灵家园的回归是其根本意义所在。

Foreword

Graham Swift (1949—) is an important contemporary English writer. The merging of historical narrative and literary narrative characterizes all his novels. Traditionally, historical narrative belongs to the positivism category, which is trying to explore the objective historical truth through scientific research, analysis and induction; literary narrative belongs to the fictional and imaginary category, which has been seen as autonomous and unrelated to the truth of external reality. However, Swift thoroughly deconstructs such an absolute distinction in his fiction: historical narrative has imaginary characteristics while literary narrative can truthfully reflect reality to some extent. They are both the products of linguistic constructs.

Swift's historical novels always display a historical epistemological uncertainty, which results from traditional historical narratives whose fundamental character is the grand narrative. Swift shakes the essentialism of traditional historical narratives through deconstructing the grand narrative and narrating "simulated" history. Shuttling from history to story, historiographic metafiction and intertextuality are the three main strategies Swift adopts to construct textualized history. As a novelist who has a strong consciousness of historical philosophy, he constantly and unconsciously reveals such a humanistic concern: returning to "history in mind" and searching for the spiritual significance of narrating history. "History in mind" has two meanings in this dissertation. On the one hand, it refers to the re-enactment of the past through the mind of the characters in the novels. On the other hand, it refers to the spiritual transformation and sublimation achieved during the historical re-

enactment. Swift distinguishes himself from other contemporary historical novelists in emphasizing “history in mind.” Exploring the significance of “history in mind” implied in his fiction is the shining point of this dissertation. Swift occupies an important position in contemporary literature, but till now, at home and abroad, there is still not a systematic research done on his historical narrative, not to mention his “history in mind.” Therefore, this study has great theoretical significance and practical value.

The book consists of the “Introduction,” the main body and the “Conclusion.” The Introduction gives a general outline of Swift’s literary career and achievements, a survey of Swift’s criticism at home and abroad and the structure of this dissertation. The main body consists of four chapters and the following are the sequential steps towards the comprehension of Swift’s writings: (1) questioning the traditional historical narrative, (2) deconstructing the grand narrative, (3) constructing textualized history, (4) returning to “history in mind.”

Chapter One discusses how Swift questions the traditional historical narrative through highlighting the epistemological uncertainty. In all Swift’s novels, we can clearly perceive that the narrators have a strong Faustian desire for knowledge of history. Swift suggests, in both theme and form, his awareness of the impossibility of truly capturing the past and of the provisionality of any historical construction. Pursuing “what really happened” in the past is the main theme for almost all his novels. The historical epistemological crisis is underlined by unreliable narrators and the genre of anti-detective fiction. Traditional historical narratives often take the narrator’s reliability for granted, while Swift adopts unreliable narrators (narrators in self-reflexivity and in “mise-en-abyme”). “Mise-en-abyme,” a prominent postmodernist device, is an enclosed narrative that reflects the framing narrative with the purpose to rob events of their solidity. Traditional detective fiction implies such an ideology:

logic and reason can help people get rid of the chaotic world to obtain order and peace. This kind of fiction always exhibits a mysterious world and makes a detective of genius solve a criminal case or unlock the riddle, hence satisfies the reader. These factors are just the points that anti-detective fiction endeavors to deconstruct. Anti-detective fiction is a sub-genre of detective fiction. It makes use of the structural elements of traditional detective fiction only to undermine its naive expectation to arrive at an explanation through research. The anti-detective fiction enhances the epistemological uncertainty. The reason why Swift highlights epistemological crisis is that he intends to question the traditional historical narrative.

Chapter Two expounds on how Swift deconstructs the grand narrative and narrates “simulated” history. “Grand narrative” is synonymous with master narrative or metanarrative, referring to all those organizing frameworks that presupposed the belief in the doctrine of God, reason, transcendental truth and science. It is an important term created by French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard who defines postmodernism as the attitude of rejecting grand narratives, as “incredulity towards metanarratives.” It mainly takes two forms. One is “speculative narrative” represented by the German classical philosophy tradition, and the other is “emancipation narrative” represented by the French enlightenment tradition. It is the fundamental character of traditional historical narratives. It holds that linguistic representation can reflect the historical truth; historical development follows a rational, linear and teleological pattern. This chapter focuses on *Waterland* to analyze how Swift uses language dilemma to deconstruct linguistic representation. He uses causality failure, circular development patterns, and “the end of history” to deconstruct the rational, linear and teleological development of history. Swift’s questioning and critique of grand narrative are further strengthened in *Out of This World*. This chapter focuses on this novel to study how

Swift takes advantage of modern media, such as photos and televisions, to manifest the impossibility of truthful representation of the past. In this aspect, Swift coincides with Jean Baudrillard who argues that “simulation” disconnects the relationship between image and historical reference. He proclaims that “simulated” history is “a real without origin or reality.” During the process of infinite copying and reproducing, the boundary between the original and the imaginary, the truthful and the fictional has been completely dissolved. Hence people live in a “floating chain of significance.” This chapter explores how Swift narrates “simulated” history from the aspects of television, photography and the real world.

Chapter Three explores how Swift constructs textualized history through merging historical narrative and literary narrative. He mainly adopts three strategies: blending of history and story, historiographic metafiction and intertextualized history. Firstly, this chapter takes *Waterland* as the study case to analyze how Swift manifests the close relationship between history and story; how he uses the detective story to explain the process of historiography; how he highlights the textuality of history by taking fairy-tales, superstitions and rumors as the indispensable narrative genres. Historiographic metafiction, a term originally created by Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, refers to fiction that is “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay[s] claim to historical events and personages.” *Waterland*, *Shuttlecock*, *Out of This World* and *Ever After* can all be defined as historiographic metafiction. In Swift’s historiographic metafiction we can find that “the metafictional and the historiographic meet in the intertexts of the novel.” The historical reference in his fiction is not in the sense of ontology, but in the sense of texts and intertexts. Swift indicates that we can not find out the original fact in the past, but only the narratives about the past through the traces of historical events. This chapter focuses on *Waterland*, *Ever After* and

Last Orders to explore how Swift constructs intertextualized history.

Chapter Four delves into how Swift returns to “history in mind” through historical interpretation and historical narrative. Italian historian Benedetto Croce said that “all the history is the contemporary history.” English historian George Collingwood argued that “all history is the history of ideas.” History is the past events and persons filtered through contemporary people’s minds. Rewriting history is to serve people’s present needs and desires. Based on the theories of Nietzsche, Dilthey, Collingwood, Heidegger and Hayden White, this dissertation reveals Swift’s “history in mind” from two aspects. On the one hand, it refers to the re-enactment of the past through the mind of the characters in the novels. History is not a fixed, transcendental, metaphysical existence. Rather, it is created by narrative and interpretation. On the other hand, it refers to the spiritual transformation and sublimation achieved during the historical re-enactment. In the depth of human’s heart, there are the desires for power, love, self-identification and spiritual sublimation. Historical narrative and its interpretation can satisfy these desires. Swift reveals the essence and significance of history. His interest in historical narration is not for its representative function, but for its positive, performative and therapeutic effects. He suggests that narrating the past can enrich our present living experience and offer a way of coming to terms with the present and the future. This chapter focuses on *Shuttlecock* to analyze how the character Prentis achieves a sense of power through interpreting his father’s war memoir; focuses on *Ever After* to illustrate how Bill obtains his self-identification through interpreting his ancestor’s journal; focuses on *Waterland* to expound how characters use historical narrative as a tool to ward off the “nothingness” of reality and endow their lives with meaning; focuses on *Last Orders* to discuss the theme of “historical narrative and spiritual sublimation” and explore how the funeral journey develops into a “journey between the past and the

present,” and “a journey of spiritual sublimation.”

The conclusion gives a summary of Swift's historical narratives and highlights the significance of this study. Studying history should be beneficial to mankind, which is the function of historical novels, the essence of Swift's historical novels, and the purpose of this dissertation. In the postmodern context, broken subjects, meaninglessness and value nihilism prevail. Swift's masterly writings provide readers with a new dimension to understand history. His fiction represents how the lost modern people reflect on the real predicament and pursue strenuously the meaning and order of life. Swift seems to tell us that the ultimate goal of any narrative is to return to our spirit and soul.

A Note on Abbreviations

Through the book, parenthetical references to Graham Swift's works use the following abbreviations:

SSO = The Sweet-Shop Owner

S = Shuttlecock

LS = Learning to Swim and Other Stories

W = Waterland

OTW = Out of This World

EA = Ever After

LO = Last Orders

LD = The Light of Day

T = Tomorrow

ME = Making an Elephant

WYWH = Wish You Were Here

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