

# Theoretical Interpretation of "Alive" in the Perspective of "Four Elements of Literature"

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## ABSTRACT

The four-factor analytical framework of Abrams has had a significant influence on literary research. This paper focuses on the theory of "Four Elements of Literature," based on the four perspectives of "world, writer, work, and reader," and examines the relationship between the work and other factors. Taking "Alive" as an example, we take the work as the center, familiarize ourselves with the author, enter the historical scene, realize the symbiosis and interaction between the elements, and explore the whole logical process of its literary activities.

## KEYWORDS

Four elements of literature; Alive; Literary theory

## 1 Introduction

The doctrine of "Four Elements of Literature" was proposed by Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* in 1953. He believed that literature consists of four elements: the world, the artist, the work, and the appreciator. and established a triangular diagram of the relationship between the four elements, centering on the work. The four-element theory contains a fourfold relationship between the work and the world, the writer and the work, the work and the reader, and the work itself in literary activities, covering almost all categories of literary activities.

## 2 The relationship between the world and the work

In the 1980s, under the background of ideological liberation, reform and opening up, various trends and schools of thought injected fresh blood into Chinese literature. In the 1990s, when the development of society shifted to the construction of the economy, and under the effect of the market, popular culture gradually occupied the position of cultural hegemony, which prompted Yu Huawei to take the lead in the development of the world. Under the influence of the market, mass culture gradually took over the hegemony of culture, prompting Yu Huawei to return to real life, focusing on his personal observations and feelings of social life, capturing the image of the little people, and shaping the image of Fugui as a commoner with humanistic concerns. With the help of Fugui, an open-minded old man who does not indulge in historical grudges, *Alive* succeeds in reflecting on the people's deepest spiritual calls and the most urgent requirements of the times.

Social existence determines social consciousness and the economic base determines the superstructure. Under the guidance of the Marxist literary theory, literature, as a part of social ideology in the superstructure, is the artistic transformation of social life with authenticity and tendency by writers based on certain standpoints, views, and methods. The main character Fugui has a distinctive identity mark, and his personal story also reflects the distinctive color of the times.

The motivation was the beginning of literary creation. Literary creation is a type of social behavior characterized by individuality. Under certain circumstances, writers will come forward to speak on behalf of society, acting as the "conscience" of society or the spokesperson of a certain social group. Fugui's personal story is based on seventy years of modern China's history, and the events that Fugui experienced happened to every ordinary person in Chinese society in those years. For Fugui's family, "staying alive" is a difficult hurdle, and Yu Hua also wants to tell readers that it is also a difficult hurdle for millions of Chinese families to overcome.

## 3 The relationship between writers and works

In the 1990s, the "vanguard" school began to transform itself into a realistic and readable school, and avant-garde novels gradually discarded their pure textual consciousness, narrative strategies, and historical discourse. However, in the 1990s, the "vanguard" school began to transform to realism and readability, and the vanguard novels gradually abandoned the pure textual consciousness, narrative strategy, and historical discourse in favor of realism and readability, and became a kind of realism returning in the literary tide of the 1990s. Yu Hua's *Alive* is often regarded as a sign of his return to realism from the vanguard position.

Chekhov said "A writer should know everything, study everything, lest he make mistakes, lest he be hypocritical." Writers' ideological and moral cultivation and cultural and artistic qualities often determine the correctness and profundity of the content of their writings as well as their social effects. Yu Hua quoted a French publisher as saying, "If

Chinese literature is to go to the world, it cannot please readers with local customs or attract readers with political reactionaries; such a time has passed, and Chinese writers must write about real Chinese people.<sup>[2]</sup> Yu Hua, at the time of *Alive*'s creation, said goodbye to the anger and indifference of his earlier narratives, and his overall writing style moved towards realism and storytelling, focusing on expressing a deeper understanding of life and the world. After reflection and new thinking about his earlier writing, *Alive* is a work in which Yu Hua re-establishes a dialogical relationship with reality, history, and literary tradition.

Creative motivation is the driving force that drives a writer into the creative process; it is also the intention, implicit or explicit, that governs the entire creative process. Yu Hua has talked about the writing motive of *Alive* many times. In 1993, he said in the preface of the Chinese version of *Alive*: I heard an American folk song "Old Negro," in which the old nigger had experienced a lifetime of suffering and his family had gone before him, but he still treated the world kindly without a word of complaint. The song moved me deeply, and I decided to write the next novel, which is this one, "*Alive*," about people's ability to bear suffering and their optimistic attitude toward the world<sup>[3]</sup>. At the same time, Yu Hua said in the interview "I just need to write, is to go home" about the establishment of the theme of the novel and the writing opportunity of the aura: in the creation of the novel "*alive*" before a long period of time obsessed with trying to think of a piece of work about the relationship between a person and his life, only a theme cannot let the work take shape. The opportunity arose early in the morning when the writer woke up and suddenly decided on the title "*Alive*," after which the idea of creating a novel immediately came to him. The image of this passage gives us insight into the manifestation of creative conflict and helps us distinguish between creative motivation and creative conflict.

The creation of literature is a complex, creative mental activity. Different authors write about suffering in different ways, and at the same time, they also reflect the psychological mechanism of the literary creation of different writers. In Yu Hua's clean writing, we do not see the author's obsession with death, but really as a listener who feels the richness of everything. Behind these stories of death, we do not hear the author's evaluation, voice of sadness, or even the slightest sympathy. The author writes about suffering, trying to abandon the social reality of the cause of suffering, and writes not only about the destiny of suffering, but also about human beings' bearing and attitude towards this kind of fatalistic suffering, that is, human nature.

In the literature, when writers reflect on social life, their works must contain their own ideological stance and emotional attitude, reflecting their own knowledge and judgment of life. In the preface of the Korean version of *Alive*, Yu Hua explains his understanding of "*alive*." He thinks that the reason why "*alive*" is full of power in the Chinese language is not because of shouting and attacking, but because of enduring. The Chinese endure all that life gives us: happiness, suffering, mediocrity, and boredom that real life gives everyone<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### 4 The work itself

In *Alive*, Yu Hua's focus of attention is placed on showing the changes of big society through the fate of small characters. In this section, the theoretical interpretation is developed from three aspects: the value, image, and language of the literary work.

From the aspect of literary value, "*Alive*" tells the tragic life of Fugui with ups and downs, showing the ungraspability and absurdity of human fate, thus inquiring about "*alive*" and "the meaning of living," dissolving the antagonism between life and death, and searching for the truth of existence. The novel is classic in terms of both the time span and depth of thought. According to the above, the author, based on social reality, refined, sublimated, and aesthetically created the main character, Fugui, and his life experience, which provides readers with the basis of literary value. The novel "*Alive*" tells the story that people live for the sake of being alive, not for the sake of anything other than being alive. When living is to live for the sake of living itself, it shows the existentialist philosophical implication that to live is to live toward death.

In terms of literary imagery, *Alive* is Fugui's personal story, which runs through the beginning of his life, his prodigal youth, and his old age and is subordinate to the model of the story of a person's life that is common in novel writing. At the beginning of the novel, Fugui emphasizes the special nature of this person, who is a strange old man that the narrator "I" met by chance when collecting folk songs, and survives in rural civil society, which is different from urban civilization and intellectual groups. In this unique space, Fugui also has his own uniqueness: "I have never met anyone as unforgettable as Fugui, who knows his own experience so well and can tell it brilliantly. He is the kind of person who can see what he used to look like; he can see exactly how he walked when he was young, and even how he aged."

From the language aspect of literature, narrative language is as simple as it is. Literary language needs to be fictionalized according to true inner experiences and feelings, to obey the logic of the art world, to reveal the essence and law of life, and to emphasize the truth of art. In his speech at the Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Yu Hua said that the setting of Fugui in the novel is a peasant who is the son of a landowner who has attended private school for three years but is still uneducated. According to this identity setting, because the novel is in fact a story of his own, he should use the simplest language to tell his own story<sup>[6]</sup>, and such a prudent use of language originates from the strict self-demand for the language of writing. Yu Hua's careful use of language stems from his strict self-requirement of writing language, saying that the only requirement for language is "accuracy", and he believes that a good writer should learn

from Lu Xun's nuclear energy-like language, which is concise but powerful, so as to maximize the energy of the language<sup>[7]</sup>. The simplicity and simplicity of the narrative language make the novel real and easy to understand, bring the distance between the reader and the narrator closer, deepen the reader's sense of immersion, and ease producing psychological empathy, the simple language but profound meaning, which is the secret of the novel across the age limit of the readers, and gained the favor of the primary and secondary school students, and the oldest and oldest people in the world.

## 5 The relationship between readers and works

Literary acceptance, which takes place between the work and the reader, is a collective term for a series of processes in which the reader reads a literary work and obtains an aesthetic experience driven by the motive of acceptance. In literary activities, writers, as creators and expressers, convey their values and other expressive intentions to readers through the medium of works, while readers, as dynamic receivers, carry out spiritual exchanges and communication with writers across time and space through works. Readers in the same period can even convey their own reading experiences to writers through certain practical channels and make deeper exchanges, and such feedback may even influence the writers' next literary creations. Such feedback may even influence a writer's subsequent literary creation.

The final realization of literary value is accomplished through readers' reading and acceptance. By interpreting the symbols of the text, readers can fully feel the value relationship of the reality shown in the work, and feel the value-dominant role played by the writer in the construction of the whole text, that is, as summarized by Yu Hua as "writing about people's ability to bear suffering and their optimistic attitude towards the world. The process of writing makes me realize that people live for the sake of living itself, not for the sake of anything other than living".

Literary values represent fluids. The literature provides timeliness in terms of time. The long novel "Alive" has been published for 28 years, influencing generations of Chinese people, and can be said to be a "masterpiece." It was also a successful self-rescue for contemporary literature, which was once full of historical resentment. The theme of "survival" is re-examined in this long novel, and it glows with a warmer and brighter light of history and humanity; literature is spatial in its spatial factors, and "Alive" is Mr. Yu Hua's masterpiece, and it is a work that is very popular among readers in the world. Yu Hua began appointing 13 works, including *Alive*, to Writers' Publishing House in May 2008 for publication. So far, sales have reached 8,668,000 copies, including a staggering 5,869,000 copies of *Alive*, creating a miracle in the sales of modern pure literary works."

Meanwhile, in terms of artistic reconstruction, the best-selling of the long novel "Alive" not only benefited from the artistic charm of the work itself, but the various forms of adapted versions also contributed to the dissemination. Due to the development of commercialization, secularization, entertainment, popularization, and consumerization of movies and TV works, film and TV works pay more attention to people's social lives, focusing on the expression of the sorrows and joys of ordinary people at present, and "the entertainment function of film and TV works has been given unprecedented prominence."

## 6 Conclusion

From the perspective of the overall development of the novel *Alive*, Fugui, as the main character of *Alive*, fully reflects the author's view of "alive." As a Chinese peasant, Fugui uses his humble life to discuss the significance of life. Although he has experienced unimaginable suffering, he still chooses to live optimistically and tenaciously. This leaves the reader with an important revelation about life; that is, everything will pass, living is the most important thing, and living happily is truly living. In today's society, with increasing pressure, many people are too fragile in the face of suffering and do not show the resilience they should have as a life, which is worthy of our deep thoughts.

## About the Author

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