

A Comparative Study on Magic Realism in *Beloved* and *Big Breasts & Wide Hips*

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Abstract: Originating in Latin America in the 1950s, magic realism has become a literary trend because of its artistic and aesthetic values. World-renowned writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Toni Morrison, and Mo Yan have published a series of literary masterpieces embedded with magical realistic elements, which draw the attention of many literary critics. This thesis uses text analysis and comparative study as research methods and examines the magical realistic elements in Mo Yan and Toni Morrison’s representative works *Beloved* and *Big Breasts & Wide Hips*. The discussion focuses on similarities and differences from the perspective of magic and reality, magic narrative techniques, magic-realistic symbols, as well as mythological archetypes and sacred scripture in those two novels. Based on this, I find that hallucinatory realism is a better term in further magical realism studies because it shows magic realism’s acceptance and transmission in China.

Keywords: magic realism; *Beloved*; *Big Breasts & Wide Hips*; comparative study

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1 Introduction

Magic realism is a literary term that originated in Latin America. Put simply, and it is a combination of magic elements and reality. Realistic characters, settings, and unrealistic events constitute the main fundamental key of these magic realists. Magic realists have achieved great success in the Modern and contemporary literary world. In 1982, Gabriel García Márquez won the Nobel Prize because of his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, “for his novels and short stories, in which the fantastic and the realistic are combined in a richly composed world of imagination, reflecting a continent’s life and conflicts.” His success brings magic realism to the world. Deeply influenced by Gabriel García Márquez and William Faulkner, Mo Yan becomes a new talent bursting on the literary scene. Toni Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for *Beloved* and the Nobel Prize in 1993, which drew many critics’ attention. In 2012, Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his work as a writer “who with hallucinatory realism merges folk tales, history and the contemporary.” From then on, he owns praise from critics all over the world as well as criticism. The word “hallucinatory realism” especially raises people’s curiosity. Many critics do comparative studies concerning their writings, and they find many differences. Different from them, I chose another point of view to do the comparative study, which others rarely step into the two novels, both influenced by Gabriel García Márquez.

Beloved is Toni Morrison’s fifth novel, which has always been regarded as the masterpiece of the contemporary black woman writer. It is this book that makes Morrison the first black Nobel Laureate. In this novel, Toni Morrison reveals a magic world before us, which got immediate notice and high evaluation when it was published. The protagonist, Sethe, kills her daughter and tries to kill her other three children when a posse arrives in Ohio to return them to Sweet Home, where Sethe would never want to come back. A woman presumed to be her daughter, called Beloved, returns years later to haunt Sethe’s home at 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati.

In America, critics have noticed the magic elements in Morrison’s *Beloved*. Joan Mellon (2000) pointed out that “the impulse of magic realism to confront the past, both from the past, both from a historical and a moral perspective, is also seen in Morrison’s *Beloved*.” (p. 20), but they haven’t done further analysis about the presentations of magic realism or its effects. Morrison’s works were introduced to China in the 1980s. The study of Toni Morrison in China is “underdeveloped” than that in Western countries. In the five major periodicals of foreign literature in China from 1988 to 2000, there are forty critical papers on Toni Morrison. Among them, seven Papers concern *Beloved*, focusing on the theme, structure, and writing style. None of them emphasize magic realism. From 2000 until now, more than 100 critical Papers on Toni Morrison can be searched in CNKI, about 60 of them concerning the relationship between Toni Morrison and magic realism. These papers have done a very good job of dealing with the main characteristics of *Beloved* and Morrison’s writing style. (Su, p. 68) “The definition of magic realism is elaborated. The main characteristic in *Beloved*, magic realism, is analyzed, as well as its functions in building up the themes. Morrison expressed the brutality of slavery through the magic world in *Beloved*. He used the patterns of mythology and folklore to reveal the repression and resistance of culture and expressed the theme with the magical narratives.” (Ma, p. 104) Papers like these give me plenty of

resources for my research.

Before Mo Yan got the Nobel Prize in literature, his works had become very popular in China and many other countries. His masterpieces like *The Galic Ballads*, *The Republic of Wine*, *Life, and Death are Wearing Me Out* are also welcome in Western countries. Research on magic realism has successfully drawn many critics' attention in China. Mo Yan styles himself as a writer of realist, often historical fiction, which is certainly true, as far as it goes. Like the Latin American creators of magic realism, he stretches the boundaries of "realism" and "historicism" in new and frequently maligned directions. The Swedish Academy, which selects the winners of the award, praised Mo's "hallucinatory realism," saying it "merges folk tales, history and the contemporary." The award is a cause of pride for a government that disowned the only previous Chinese winner of the award, an exiled critic.

Research on Mo Yan's works did not attract people's attention before the 1990s. In 2010, the number of papers concerning Mo Yan increased to over 100. At the very beginning, critics concentrate more on the analysis of Mo Yan's masterpieces. With the growth of comparative literature, research on Mo Yan becomes "international." Compared with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and many other famous writers, critics learn more about Mo Yan's creative writing. So, I should say that the existing research on Mo Yan's work has become a trend, and it will be more prosperous since Mo Yan got the Nobel Prize in 2012. Although the Swedish Academy named Mo Yan's style hallucinatory realism, we notice that he is also deeply influenced by magic realism from Latin America. According to Chen Liming (2008), "The transmission and acceptance of magic realism are broadening with our better understanding of humans. And we will have a more vivid understanding of magic realism with the development of open and reforming in the cultural field." (p. 26) Since magic realism plays such a significant role in Chinese Modernistic Literature, we must do detailed research on it. This paper employs magic realism as a theoretical foundation and mainly focuses on the comparative study of *Beloved* and *Big Breasts & Wide Hips* (*BBWH*). This thesis is not only a necessary supplement to the study of magic realism but also provides an important reference frame in the study of magic realism's transmission in China.

2 Real Characters and Setting & Unreal Events

Beloved is a realistic magic work in which reality and fantasy are both present. The setting of the story is a real place, and events that happened in the novel are based on real events. The story happened after the American Civil War, when an African-American slave, Margaret Garner, temporarily escaped from slavery in 1856 in Kentucky by fleeing to Ohio, a free state. A posse arrived to retrieve her and her children under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which gave slave masters the right to pursue slaves across state borders. Margaret killed her two-year-old daughter instead of allowing her to be recaptured. That is the foundation of the whole story. Moreover, her work is a sample of the works, which are mostly associated with political power and the influential societies that are battling against the influence of their previous dominant rules, considering themselves to be at the margins. (Bowers, 2004)

Quite a lot of unrealistic events can be found in this novel, which is taken for granted by the characters as if they are parts of this world. The most significant of these events is Denver's seeing the ghost as a "white dress"

that “knelt next to her mother and had its sleeves around her mother’s waist” (Toni, M. p. 35). Also, *Beloved* appeared from the river in the form of a fully-grown woman when she was a one-year-old baby, eighteen years after she had been murdered by Sethe. These are references to an embodiment of slavery and cruelty, presented in a symbolic way.

Compared with *Beloved*, Mo Yan’s *BBWH* shares the same feature: a combination of real characters and settings and unreal events. At the beginning of this novel, he claims that “to the spirit of my mother” (Mo, p. 1). Unlike *Beloved*, stories that happened in Gaomi are not directly from one single true event or story but a collection of historical events in Chinese history. *Beloved* shows us an age when slaves were not treated as human beings, while *BBWH* reveals to us the grave disasters that the Chinese have borne during the past 100 years, from the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 to the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the early years of Sun Yat-Sen’s republic, the Japanese invasion in the 1930s, the civil war between the CCP and Kuomintang, the cultural revolution, and the post-Mao years. In the additional part of his book, there are also events related to Modern China which mainly focus on influences brought up by reform and opening policy. Like Mo Yan, Shangguan Jintong is the youngest in his family. The unpredictable fate of his eight sisters is destined to be a tragedy in that special period. Mo Yan says, “in the book *BBWH*, I applied many true events that happened to my mother and me without scruple” (Shao, C. & Zhang, Y. p10). Regarding this, the main characters and plots and stories’ outlandish elements were inspired by real events even though we do not have the exact example to illustrate.

The novel is loaded with unrealistic events, which are taken into serious consideration by the main characters of the novel. Lingdi, the third sister, also known as Bird Fairy, becomes famous quickly in Northeast Gaomi Town and beyond. Many people come to Jintong’s house to get the panacea. The prescription is unique and filled with an aura of mischief: “a powdered mixture of seven bees, a pair of dung beetle’s excrement balls, an ounce of peach leaves, and a half catty of crushed eggshells, taken with water.” (Mo Yan, p. 151). It seems that the description is real and vivid, showing the details in every way. Nonetheless, the magic power of Lingdi is obviously mythological. “...the bird fairy had used her mystical powers to punish that terrible man, to the boisterous delight of the good people and the enhancement of her own reputation.” (Mo Yan, p. 152) It is easy to catch the main property of these two novels: an integration of Realistic Characters, Settings, and Unreal Events. Common features are shared between Toni Morrison’s “village literature” and Mo Yan’s Gaomi-township. She claims to write for the “village” or the “tribe,” while Mo Yan claimed to be a farmer as well as a writer. He does not write for the farmer or “village” but writes as a farmer. (Mo Yan, 2002)

3 Magic Narrative Techniques

3.1 *Multi-angle narrative techniques*

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison uses the multi-voice narrative strategy in portraying the central conflict—infanticide. Rather than confirming storytelling as a singularly authentic form of communication, Morrison’s applied numerous ways in *Beloved*—official and unofficial, central and decentralized, privileged and marginal. The processor unlocking the events of 18 years ago is revealed little by the painful memory (A word created by

Toni Morrison, which means the memory appears by itself.). Morrison moves around all the characters, allowing each one in turn to share their perception of events with the reader. The important events are not thoroughly described at once based on the timeline: such as the tale of Sethe's escape and Denver's birth, especially the infanticide. They are told by or remembered through the consciousness of various characters— Denver, Sethe, Paul D. , Stamp Paid, Beloved and other black women in the Bluestone 124 as well as through the voice of the writer, each one of them contributes a little to the truth and making the mystery clear and closer to readers.

Baby Suggs' perspective is expressed in chapter fifteen, which allows the readers to sense a mysterious and suspicious atmosphere. After Sethe arrived at Bluestone 124, Stamp Paid brought over two pails of rare, deliciously sweet blackberries. Baby Suggs decided to bake some pies, and before long, the celebration had transformed into a feast for ninety people. Baby Suggs sensed a "dark and coming thing" in the distance, but the atmosphere of jealousy created by the town's people clouded her perception because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess" (Morrison, 2004, p. 163). But suddenly, she realized that it was not only the colored people but something else. "Behind the disapproving odor, way back behind it, she smelled another thing. Dark and coming. Something she couldn't get at because the other odor hid it" (Morrison, 2004, p. 163). The reader can get a vague reason why Sethe attempts to kill her own children in the middle of the novel.

In the middle of the story, the schoolteacher who has come to bring Sethe and her children back to slavery which showed his point. For him, the infanticide and Sethe's attempt to kill her children are simply a testimony to the result of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they hated. And he treats Sethe as a nigger woman or a creature. For Sethe, infanticide is a "mercy killing," and she takes it as the deepest hurt in her heart. From this, we can see when infanticide is happening and what makes a mother cut the throat of her own baby: the helplessness of a mother, the thick mother's love, the fear of losing her children, and her abomination of slavery.

The narrative mode encompasses not only who tells the story, but also how the story is described or expressed (for example, by using stream-of-consciousness or unreliable narration). The "narrator" could also be more than one person because some stories are from more than one point of view, showing different storylines of people at the same time. Critics pay more attention to the first-person narrative because many of them take the second-person narrative as a first-person narrative. In *BBWH*, the use of second-person narrative is a great success. For it makes the audience member feel as if he or she is a character within the story. The second-person narrative mode is often paired with the first-person narrative mode in which the narrator makes emotional comparisons among the thoughts, actions, and feelings of "you" versus "I." Gao Xingjian (1981) claims that "the use of second-person narration is getting more and more popular, because of the emotional comparisons which can be produced to readers." (p. 13)

In the novel, Mo Yan called the eighth sister in the first person and "she" in the third person; however, it is transformed to the second person "you" when depicting the eighth sister sinking gradually so as to demonstrate the deeply hidden love from Jingtong to the eighth sister. However, sometimes it is a mess because of the frequent appearance of you, me, and her. Additional chapters two and three use the first person, additional chapter four in the third person, additional chapter five in the first person, and chapters six and seven in the third person. The usage of the third person makes it possible to narrate the story clearly. And the first person contributes

a lot to telling family history in the view of Shangguan Jingtong. At the same time, the application of the second person enhances the emotional illustration. Mo Yan takes full advantage of those parts combining them to be a unit.

The character of multi-points of view functioning differently and the ability of the free-view switch helps Mo handle his rhythm easily, which is helpful to expression and bilateral criticizing between narrator and narratee. The switch sometimes occurs between two paragraphs, sometimes among chapters. Sometimes it even happens in a single paragraph.

Chapters		Point of View
Chapter1-Chapter10		Third person
Chapter11-Chapter36		First person
Chapter38		First person & Third person
Chapter39		First person & Third person
Chapter40	The first half	First person
	The others	Third person
Chapter42-Chapter50		Third person
Chapter51	The first half	Third person
	The second half	First person
Chapter52	The first half	First person
	The others	Second person & Third person
Chapter54		First person
Chapter55		Third person
Chapter56		Third person & First person
Chapter57-Chapter58		Third person
Chapter59-Chapter63		First person

The above table is a detailed description of the “Person” in *BBWH*

In short, the employment of multiple points of view is unique. In *Beloved*, the same events are presented in numerous voices, and each retells from different perspectives, with none taking precedence over the other. Each time, a different facet of the story is presented so as to form the same yet distinct story. Through skillful use of the multi-voice in narration, Morrison completely broke the traditional linear narrative structure, which is the main feature in the narration of this novel. She interweaves numerous memories and impressions into a whole in which the history and the fate of blacks are clearly shown. Meanwhile, Morrison makes the personal experience go up to a high degree of national destiny in this novel. Thus, this creative technique has strong shock and magic power.

3.2 Juxtaposition of the past and the present

One of the features of the two novels is broking the linear narration in structure. The juxtaposition of the past

and the present serves to reinforce the idea that the past is alive in the present. *BBWH* applies flashbacks quite often, but we can see the basic clue and it would be easy for us to grasp the main plot. *Beloved* is more like a work of stream of consciousness, and it is hard for us to grasp the main plot.

Morrison melds the entire story into one inseparable piece to be gazed at by giving us fragments to work with. From a stylistic perspective, Morrison's artistry in this regard is nothing short of breathtaking. It is not a linear tale that was told from the very beginning to the end, so the readers should read from the very beginning to the end. Sometimes the past is told in flashbacks, sometimes in stories, and sometimes it is plainly told as if it were happening in the present as Morrison frequently uses the present tense. Morrison's detailed description of details, memories, and lyrical commentary forms a liquid stream that carries the reader along the intriguing tale. In *Beloved*, the "Jigsaw puzzle" structure is applied. Almost all paragraphs in it are connected with a different timeline. Morrison arranges the time order in accordance with her mind flows. Such arrangement exemplifies the "dislocation of time" which can be found quite often in literal works concerning magic realism. There are two sets of time schemes to narrate the story: the "present time scheme" and the "past time scheme." The former is pointed out at the beginning of the novel: "For years each puts up with this spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its own victims." (Morrison, p. 3) The "past time scheme" appears when the character recalled the past starting from the 1850s. The past and present are mingled and mutually interfered with the development of plots. Just as Morrison (1994) said, "My writing expects, demands participatory reading...the reader supplies the emotions. The reader even supplies even some of the color and some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it." (p. 164) Readers have their own understanding and comprehension of the same text, which also causes magic effects.

In Mo Yan's storytelling, critics reach a consensus that he is a writer who is addicted to mingling the past and the present into a whole entity. For me, Mo Yan's works' structure is the "montage." Montage is a technique in film editing in which a series of short shots are edited into a sequence to condense space, time, and information. The term has been used in various contexts. It was introduced to cinema primarily by Eisenstein (Bordwell & David, 2005), And early Russian directors used it as a synonym for creative editing. Montage can be treated as a core concept in film editing, that's because of the magic effect produced by it.

Through the free combination, the esthetic function of montage can be very extensive. It can strengthen the power of living things, adjust tempo and mentality, stimulate new ways of thinking and relating, and create time and space. Mo Yan's sense of freedom and revelry make it possible for characters in his novel to get through easily from the past to the present. The magic effect is also achieved by the free shifting of insights, which plays a significant role in arousing readers' association and impacting the reader's emotions and psychology. There are two ways for Mo Yan to put montage into *BBWH*: First, people telling stories about the past can be a bridge connecting the past and the present. Second, by shifting frames, Mo Yan tries to achieve a slow or rapid pace when moving the plot forward. In *BBWH*, the main plot is arranged in accordance with the time sequence, whereas in some parts of the novel, especially the last several chapters, the main characters recall their memories more often. In chapter forty-five, Shangguan Lü said, "I do what has to be done, son. don't laugh at me. I've done many bad things in my life, but this is the first time I've stolen anything." (Mo Yan, p. 440) These "bad things" here are her old memories. To stand in her family, she has to make babies until she gets a boy. This

reminds the readers about what she had done in order to achieve this goal and finish this holy and important task.

At the same time, readers rethink the meaning of “bad” here. In the following part, Shangguan Lu resumes her memory. (Mo Yan, p. 440)

At first, I hid them in my socks, but they caught me and made me feel lower than a dog...At first, I had to use a chopstick to make myself throw up...oh, the feeling..., but now I'm used to it...your mother's stomach has turned into a grain sack.

This conversation happens after Jintong comes back home from the farmyard. When he finds the special method, his mother makes the “dish.” Readers sympathize with Jintong's feelings as well as his mother's. It seems like a picture or animation which reappears in front of our eyes, showing their suffering and hunger through telling the story by Shangguan Lü. The way how Shangguan Lü “steals” the food is so real and cruel, as if it is not true, and that is the writer's purpose, which is a representation of magic realism. The contrast between chapters forty-five and forty-six is also achieved by using an obvious time signal. Things have become so different in China before and after the 1980s. The arrangement of the time and the change of the world is to show the readers how quickly time flies and how hard these miserable days be forgotten. And that's how montage works in movies as well as literal works.

Like the jigsaw structure used in *Beloved*, the montage style shifting frames are also applied in *BBWH*. Jigsaw structure emphasizes the entity consisting of segments. Nonetheless, montage takes these segments as a whole part and achieves special aesthetic value and significance by shifting them or revealing them from different perspectives. Readers can feel the narrating tempo and the mental activity of the main characters of the novel. From chapter one to chapter nine, several scenes are displayed in front of us at the same time. The center of the whole thing is the birth of Jintong and Yunü; however, we cannot integrate these scenes into an entirety, which is different from the jigsaw structure in *Beloved*. Shangguan Lü emptied her dustpan onto the exposed surface of the kang and gently asked her daughter-in-law to climb back up immediately. She then said, “go ahead and have you baby...Your father-in-law and Laidi's daddy are in the barn tending to the black donkey. This will be her first foal, so I should be out there giving them a hand.” (Mo Yan, p. 4) Yes, Shanguan Lu just wants to show her impatience to Shangguan Lü and leaves her alone. She has to take care of the black donkey. A woman's life is much cheaper than a donkey, that's the point of the scene (scene one).

Scene two is about the central character of the novel, Shangguan Lu, and she keeps praying to Guanyin and her ancestors. “Merciful Bodhisattva Guanyin, who succors the downtrodden and the distressed, protect and take pity on me, deliver a son to this family...” (Mo Yan, p. 4). This is the monologue as well as psychological activity. Although she was lying on the bed, we can infer that her spirit was kneeling down in front of the Buddha or her ancestor's memorial table. From another point of view, we can see how urgent and eager she wants a son. Scene three is the Japanese army's invasion which shows the environment when Jintong and Yunü were born to readers that the beginning of the story is the chaos of war. Putting these scenes together forms a sharp contrast (war) between humans and animals, ideals and realities, China and Japan. Later, in the chapter, when Shangguan Lu got herself back from the coma because of violent pain, she prayed again, “God in Heaven,

Blessed Virgin! Send down your grace and bounty to save my soul” (Mo Yan, p. 39). The praying shows that Shangguan Lu’s belief begins to change. At least she believes in these two “gods” at the same time. This really gives the story a good beginning which clearly shows the Background of the times as well as the main character. Therefore, readers will find it very interesting and feel inspired to read it further to grasp the whole thing that happens in the novel. This is not the same as *Beloved*.

Above all, they create an atmosphere that combines the past and the present, mingles different people and different events at the same time, creating a magical effect, not only producing in its readers the pleasure of a reading experience but also embodying the national cultural background to the maximum.

4 Magic-realistic Symbols

Magic realists usually make full use of exaggeration, absurdity, and mysterious techniques to show the social reality and people’s living conditions by the description of absurd and strange events, which are expressed by puns and metaphorical methods. Just as I have mentioned before, magic realists often describe one event or character from different angles or describe different events and characters from one angle but from a different point of view. In characterization, magic realists describe characters step-by-step by adding mystery to reveal their inner world.

4.1 *Magic-realistic symbols in Beloved*

In *Beloved*, almost every slave is suffering from the slavery system, which has already been abolished. But the severe pains that were brought by the system will never be erased from slaves’ minds. They find it difficult to get a peaceful and pleasant life although they are now free. Thus, painful memory will be an important point in understanding the novel and slavery. As the name of the novel, *Beloved* is the main character of the novel and the plot is mainly developed based on her. She is the center of the novel and also the key to understanding the whole novel. Like *BBWH*, we cannot be sure what exactly the breast means in different parts of the novel. *Beloved* also takes on a different form and represents a different symbolic image.

4.1.1 *The killed baby— victim under the slavery system*

In the first stage, *Beloved* appears as a dead girl killed by her mother. Under the slavery system, many children are persecuted by slave owners. Since birth, they are slave-owners private property just because their parents are slaves. They have no right to get freedom and education. More importantly, they have already been killed spiritually, which is nothing different from death. They are killed by the slavery system.

4.1.2 *The ghost— black people’s miserable past*

Beloved appears in the shape of a ghost of the dead girl of Sethe, who keeps haunting the house where Sethe and Denver live. Whenever Sethe struggles against the ghost, she cannot help putting herself into the deep valley of the past, which has tortured her so many times. The ghost’s haunting the house is a symbolic meaning of Sethe’s unforgettable past. That the ghost keeps haunting the houses shows that Sethe fails to abandon the terrible past time and time again. Gradually, For Sethe, her daily life is a “serious work of beating backs the past.” (Toni Morrison, p. 73) In fact, the story that *Beloved* revives after death and comes back is a fantastic story.

What happens in the story is absolutely not real. Toni Morrison has profound meanings to arrange two-year-old Beloved to revive after death. Beloved does not have a name and independent consciousness; her death is like wind, without any marks. It is just an epitome of 60 million even more black slaves who just died under the circumstances of slavery. White man's world and American society neglect the value and meaning that the Black person exists. They forget millions of Black persons' death is just as people's treating Beloved. They can only remember that there is such a thing as whether the person reviving after death is Beloved or not; even Sethe is not sure for a long time.

4.2 *Magic-realistic symbols in Big Breasts & Wide Hips*

In *BBWH*, the breast is necessary for Jintong's life. Without breasts, Jintong will die. When Jintong grew up, the environment would not allow him to drink milk anymore, but he cannot forget the pleasure and sense of safety brought by his mother's breasts. Thus, instead of making love with single-breast Jin, he just sucks her breast even though it is "single." He knows that being addicted to breasts is wrong, but he just cannot stop it. Like slaves in *Beloved*, they want to forget the miserable days, but these days even come more often in their minds or dreams. Beloved and breasts in the two novels are important symbols. It is proper if we say those are the soul of the novels. The identification of Beloved is not clear. The things that happened between them are hard to believe. Readers will never have the right answer to this question, and that is where the magic and reality lie in the novels.

4.2.1 *Resistance to grown up and the filthy society*

In *BBWH*, we can find that the scene where Shangguan Jintong refuses to eat food and insists on drinking milk will impress us so much. As the only boy in the family, Shangguan Jintong owns the love and concern of all the family members. Thus, he is the only person who can drink milk all the way until he has to give it up when his family faces the hardest time. If he just gives it up at that time, it will be a failure for the writer who wants to make Jintong a symbol of insistence at that time. When Jintong gets a serious illness after he is sent back from jail, there is only one way to get him to survive: the milk from the breast.

Jintong is a symbol of eternity, and he is the only one who is still alive at the end of the novel. First of all, his eight sisters, seven nephews, and his mother died of different reasons, except Parrot; secondly, he has incurable breast fetishism. Mentally, he is an old baby, never grown up. He cannot get used to life without milk. The birth of a human means the disconnection of the mother's body. From a safe and warm space to an unfamiliar environment, people need great courage and confidence. And the ablactation means the official ending of the absolute adherence between mother and son. From this perspective, breast fetishism is the illustration of a human being's willingness to back to their mother's breast. As the purist food in the world, milk stands for a pure and innocent world. Jintong's attitude toward foods is "living animals" and "the fibers of vegetation" (Mo Yan, p. 232). Even whenever his disease comes back, he will throw out all the filth. We can take this as Jintong's resistance to the filthy society.

4.2.2 *The worship of woman and reproduction*

It is risky to use "Big Breasts & Wide Hips" as a title because it is easy for the readers to think about sex. Many critics blame Mo Yan's choice of title for a simple reason to draw people's attention and therefore

underestimate its literal value. Although the title can cause sexual association, what Mo Yan wants to express is reproduction. We can see the original adoration of the mother and reproduction. When Jintong was a little child, he showed great interest in breasts. In addition, he can judge his mother's mood from the taste of the milk. When he was grown up, his infatuation with breasts grew much more. No one other than him could understand breast better. In his lifetime, Jintong encounters numerous breasts: his sisters' breasts, his nephew's breasts, a stranger's breasts in the snow market, and even a goat's breasts. This is the evidence to prove that Jintong is not an immoral behavior who would not let any breast slip from his hands. On the contrary, it reveals all the men's dreams: they not only need love from their mothers but also from all the females. According to Mo Yan, there is a Shangguan Jintong in every writer's mind.

There are more than two ways to show the worship of breasts. One is the detailed description of breasts, and the other is through Jintong's breast fetishism. Jintong's love and worship for the breast can be divided into three types. First, take breast (milk) as food. From this point of view, all females are equal: his mother, sisters, neighbors, and the she-goat. He drinks their milk and loves their breasts. In the second place, Jintong makes breasts as sex. In the process of Jintong's growing up, all his sexual fantasy is related to breast. Thirdly, as the symbol of beauty and purity, Jintong behaves properly without any considerations concerning sex in the snow market. Because of this attitude, he hates those people who devastate and ruin the breasts.

5 Mythological Archetypes and Sacred Scripture

To increase the magic feeling in their literal works, both Mo Yan and Toni Morrison have paid much attention to the employment of mythological archetypes and sacred scripture. Besides, by applying different mythological archetypes from their own countries or cultural systems, they can easily stand out as "themselves," which illustrates that they are not the imitators of Gabriel García Márquez.

5.1 *Employment of mythological archetypes in Beloved*

As one of the most salient characteristics of magic realism, the employment of mythological archetypes can be found everywhere in *Beloved*. As an African American, Morrison has the advantage of adopting mythic archetypes from different cultures. Morrison uses these mythic archetypes to explore the miserable lives of the Black slaves and expose the cruelty of the slave owners. The employment of mythic patterns strengthens the artistic influence and deepens the themes of *Beloved*. American critic Cynthia Davis (1982) notes that Morrison's skillful "combination of social observation with broadening and allusive commentary gives her fiction the symbolic quality of myth...the search for a myth adequate to experience is one of Morrison's central themes." (p. 323) Generally speaking, Morrison's use of Greek mythology is subtle and suggestive rather than direct. Her allusions, even the fairly obvious comparison, invite the reader to tease out implications rather than figuring out one-to-one symbolic correspondence.

As an African American, Morrison was brought up and educated in the American culture. Thus, she is strongly influenced and makes herself acquainted with western myths. And these myths are mainly taken from the Bible and the mysterious stories of the Western world. Morrison successfully combines these Western elements

with the native African-American culture. In this way, she forms her own way of writing.

5.1.1 *Seth*

Sethe is the beautiful and arrogant woman in the novel, whose name originates from Bible—Seth. According to the Hebrew bible version (Genesis 4: 1–8):

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you furious? And why are you downcast? If you do right, won’t you be accepted? But if you do not do right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.”

And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Due to God’s rejection of his offering and jealousy, Cain killed Abel. Therefore, God gives the third son to Adam and Eve. And Eve believed God had appointed him as a replacement for Abel. In *Beloved*, Morrison also hoped that Sethe would be blessed by God. However, In Egyptian mythology, Set (or Seth) is portrayed as the usurper who killed and mutilated his own brother Osiris. Osiris’ wife, Isis, reassembled Osiris’ corpse and embalmed him. Osiris’ son Horus sought revenge upon Set, and the myths describe their conflicts. Osiris was a wise lord, king, and bringer of civilization who happily married his sister, Isis. Set was envious of his brother, so he killed and dismembered Osiris. Seth here is a cruel, pitiless man with no mercy. Obviously, the name Sethe which was given by Morrison, has double meanings. Therefore, Sethe is endowed with two different kinds of characteristics: goodness, loveliness, nobleness, and piousness, as well as indifference, ferociousness, and sinisterness. The infanticide shows Sethe’s sense of dignity which shows the kindness and greatness of motherhood, instead of cruelty, ruthlessness, and tyrannical. (Luo, 2011)

5.1.2 *Garden of Eden*

In *Beloved*, Sweet Home is a parody of the Garden of Eden. What we can tell from the name is the harmony and sweetness of the “Sweet Home,” where Sethe and other slaves are treated as instruments of labor. The origin of the story is Sethe’s escaping from the plantation— “sweet home,” and the escaping, as we can see, is the parody and rewriting of the Lost Paradise in the Bible. The second part of the Genesis creation narrative opens with God creating the first human, whom he places in a garden “in the east, in Eden.” God asks the man to take care of the garden but forbids him to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The first man and woman break God’s command and eat the forbidden fruit of the tree, and God expels them from the garden. Corresponding to this, Mr. Garner, the owner of Sweet Home, “having demonstrated one more time what a real Kentuckian was: one tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers’ men” (p. 13) He treats the slaves equally and calls them man to show they are equal; he never blames them and teaches them all kinds of skills. In Sethe’s eyes, Sweet Home is a beautiful, idyllic plantation. Sethe’s memory gives a vivid description:

...suddenly Sweet Home was rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not want to make her scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It

never looked as terrible as it was, and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone are all right but hidden in lacy groves. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. (p. 7)

They are ignorant of the truth of slavery and complacent about being called “men.” With the Schoolteacher’s takeover of Sweet Home, all the dreamlike life comes to an end. From then on, they are treated barbarously, and Sweet Home becomes a place that is neither sweet nor a home. Finally, Sethe finds that her human and animal “characteristics” are measured by her Schoolteacher, and she decides to escape from Sweet Home. Unlike Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, Sethe’s escape is on her own initiative. Her escape is the Negation of Sweet Home, which tells us that the Sweet Home does not exist like the unreachable Garden of Eden.

5.1.3 *African folklores as archetypes*

Magic realism is deeply rooted in traditional cultures; thus, Morrison employs supernatural elements, including African-American folklore and African mythological, archetypal stories. This technique leaves the reader further thinking through the illusions.

I have mentioned the “jigsaw structure” before in this thesis from the narration’s perspective. However, this kind of “jigsaw” has another meaning if we see it in another way. There is an African mythological archetypal story: once upon a time, there was a beautiful girl who is inspired by many people. She refused all of them because all of them are not handsome enough to win her heart. A devil heard of this and decided to try. He wandered around and collected the most handsome face, and the strongest body, making himself the most handsome man in the world. The beauty is attracted by the devil’s appearance, ignoring all her family’s opposition, and running away with the devil. All the way running with this pretty girl, the devil returned everything he borrowed one by one. And this is the time when the girl notices that the man she loves is an ugly devil. (Wang, 2011)

In the novel, *Beloved* is a combination of pieces borrowed from here and there. First of all, like the devil in the story, *Beloved*’s body is an integration of several parts. In chapter five, “She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hands.” (p. 61). “Her skin was flawless except for three vertical scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like hair, baby hair before it bloomed and roped into the masses of black yarn under her hat.” (p. 62) “Sethe saw that her feet were like her hands, soft and new.” From these descriptions, we can see that Morrison repeatedly strengthens *Beloved*’s body as soft and tender. It seems that raising the head is very difficult for this twenty-year-old girl, “Her neck, its circumstance no wider than a parlor-service saucer, kept bending ...” (p. 60).

Above all, we get the information that *Beloved*’s body is not compatible with her age. Later in chapter fourteen, “*Beloved* went on probing her mouth with her finger.” (p. 157) This reminds her to think that maybe like her teeth, her body may disappear one day. Second of all, Sethe’s experience is formed by many small events, which I have done detailed research on and explained in the narration part. *Beloved*’s experience stands for what all the miserable days the slaves have been through. Through this magical description of historical reality, Morrison shows us that *Beloved* cannot be removed from black people’s minds.

5.2 *Employment of mythological archetypes in Big Breasts & Wide Hips*

5.2.1 *Buddhist literary connotation*

The Buddhist literary connotation in Mo Yan's novels is the key for us to get a better understanding of magic realism. The employment of Buddhist doctrines in literature is not Mo Yan's creation. However, Mo Yan takes the best advantage of the resources from Buddhist doctrines and makes it a summit. In *BBWH*, not only Buddhist doctrines were applied when Mo Yan created these characters, but also the Western religion—Christianity. For Mo Yan (2007) himself, he feels closer to Buddhism, "Among the world's three major religions, I feel more destined for Buddhism because of the extraordinary beauty." (Mo Yan, p. 326) And he also claims that "Without religious spirit, it is very hard for a novel to become a classic." (p. 404) Therefore, he combines religion from the west with Buddhism, which forms a sharp contrast between different cultures. In addition, he also applies Folk myths and legends to make his novel unique. The application of these skills inserted more magic elements in Mo Yan's novels, which achieved great success.

An Apsara is a female spirit of the clouds and waters in Hindu and Buddhist mythology. Apsaras are beautiful, supernatural female beings. They are youthful and elegant and superb in the art of dancing. They are the "symbol of luck and beauty." In China, Apsara can be seen in literal works and Buddhist scriptures as well. In *Journey to the West*, one of the most important novels of China, Bonze Tang ascends to heaven with his three followers. Ascending to heaven in Apsara's plot is very common in Buddhist scriptures. People who are destined to become Buddha and Buddhist Arhat must ascend to heaven in the day. It is also the key point to solving problems that cannot be solved in this mortal world. But in Mo Yan's novels, things do not always happen like this. These flying people finally return to the land of reality and die. The violation of tradition breaks the magic and brings everything back to reality, which gives readers more space to think about.

In *BBWH*, Lingdi decides to marry Birdman Han, who was taken away to Japan because of war. On the third day after Birdman Han was taken away, "Third Sister got off the Kang, barefoot, shamelessly tore open her blouse, and went outside, where she jumped up into the pomegranate tree." (p. 147) Since then, Lingdi becomes the Bird Fairy. From there, we can see the whole thing is magical. The third Sister's behavior shows her desperate attitude toward Birdman Han's being taken away. In Sima Ku's fly body experiment, Third Sister died. "When she uttered the strange, shrill noise...her nose had hooked into a beak, her eyes had turned yellow, her neck had retreated into her torso, her hair had changed into feathers, and her arms were now wings." (p. 223) Before she jumps into the deep valley, she became the Bird Fairy again. The description of the scene put the characters and readers in the same space. We hope to see Lingdi will fly to heaven, where there is no sorrow, no suffering, and no pressure from the mortal world. But she failed us, "...she flapped up and down as she climbed the increasingly steep hillside, shrieking as if alone in the world and heading straight for the precipice." (p. 223) Finally, she falls onto the cold and pitiless ground.

As the writer, Mo Yan should just tell the story, and leave the readers to think. The combination of magic elements and reality raises a question for us: what is the truth? Different from the Buddhist Arhat, Bird Fairy's ascending is a tragedy. But Mo Yan still shows his attitude through Jintong's reaction, "She was already soaring through the air below the precipice—I prefer the word soaring to plunging." The comment shows Mo Yan's

sympathy for Lingdi.

Another example of Flying Apsara's plot is Sha Zaohua. After Sima Liang refuses her Passionate Proposing, she jumps out of the window. Sima Liang, who wants to show his masculinity, also follows Zaohua and jumps out of the window. The result is thought-provoking: ShaZaohua dies and Sima Liang survives the "disaster". When Zaohua falls out from the window, many people outside appreciate the "magnificent spectacle" like the Chinese people in Lu Xun's works, "People below craned their necks to witness the spectacle, ignoring the body of Sha Zaohua, which was spattered like a dead dog on the cement in front of them..." the reaction reveals the Chinese's "Onlooker" psychology, showing us that even economic development cannot solve all the problem, people's "Onlooker" psychology is the best demonstration.

5.2.2 *Superstitious tradition in Chinese folk customs*

In Mo Yan's understanding, the folk customs and folk culture mainly originated from his hometown—Northeastern Gaomi Township. He once claimed that "For me, the hometown is forever a dreamland, an everlasting sadness, a Kind of spiritual sustenance, and an escape from real life." (Ji, 2006) Therefore, Mo Yan puts all the superstitious traditions and Chinese folk customs from his hometown and his own experiences into his novels. Like Morrison's appliance of African folklore, the use of superstitious tradition in Chinese folk customs has also achieved great success in addressing the writing topic and achieving a magic effect.

One example of a superstitious tradition is the story of Linda—the Third Sister, as well as the Bird Fairy. She is not the only "Fairy" in Northeast Gaomi Township. "In the brief history of Northeast Gaomi Township, six women have been transformed into a fox, hedgehog, weasel, white snake, badger, and bat fairies, all a result of love denied or a bad marriage; each lived a life of mystery, earning the fearful respect of others." (p. 148) Here it provides a tradition and reason for the Bird Fairy's appearance, and this is just the beginning of making the readers believe that Bird Fairy does not come from anywhere. Shangguan Lu's reaction officially confirms the existence of the Bird Fairy, "Now a Bird Fairy had appeared in my house, which both terrified and disgusted Mother. But she didn't dare say anything that went against Third Sister's wisher..." (p. 148) and mother set a meditation room for the Bird Fairy in a side room. Later, Bird Fairy shows her extraordinary divine power. She can punish these evil people and help those patients with strange diseases. When we all believe that Bird Fairy is a true "Goddess" beyond the six great divisions in the wheel of karma as well as life and death, she dies. I prefer to take this as the break of feudal myth and a critique of reality: people must pretend to be wired sorceresses so that they can keep living in the world.

5.2.3 *Connotation of Taoism culture*

Taoism is a philosophical and religious tradition that emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao. The term Tao means "way," "path" or "principle" and can also be found in Chinese philosophies and religions other than Taoism. (Wikipedia) In Taoism, however, Tao denotes something that is both the source and the driving force behind everything that exists. In *BBWH*, Jintong is chosen as the Snow Prince. The founder of the snow market is a Taoist Men's Teacher—Taoist Chen, who received his instruction from Laozi, the founder of Taoism himself. And Taoist Chen has risen to heaven to become immortal. I would rather call the snow market a combination of Taoism and superstitious tradition than take it as a religion, for what they have done is far beyond the religious meaning.

Organizers of the snow market and the Snow Prince will get paid from the instruction: “They give me several pairs of straw sandals and some dirty money, as a reward for my elected as the Snow Prince.” (Mo, p. 290) Compared with dirty money, women’s breasts are pure and honest. According to tradition, the Snow Prince has to touch all the women’s breasts from Gaomi to give them the blessing, “The Snow Prince raised his purified hands in the benediction to the women of Northeast Gaomi Township.” The whole thing is holy and finished quietly. According to Laozi (1993), “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.” (p. 1) People keep the rules from the beginning to the end. All of a sudden, the rules break: “Grunting like a little pig, she grabbed my head and buried it in her bosom, where her overheated breast burned my face, and I heard her mutter softly, ‘Dear boy...my own dear boy...’.” (p. 331) Without any instructions, we could only infer the reason why Old Jin (known for her single breast) broke the rule. That is a good combination of Taoism culture and magic realism.

From the comparative analysis of these two novels from the mythological archetypes and sacred scriptures perspective, we can find that both *Beloved* and *BBWH* share some common features. They all use religious quotations or religious connotations they are familiar with. Seth and the Garden of Eden are classics in Christianity. Flying Apsara is a well-known classic in Buddhism. Besides, Morrison also applies African folklore as archetypes in *Beloved*, just like Taoism in *BBWH*. Different from *Beloved*, Mo Yan also applies Christianity in *BBWH* (I have not done a detailed analysis before for lack of space), which originated from the West, but Morrison has not mentioned Eastern Religions. Although that’s due to the Western invasion, Mo Yan’s cultural awareness connects his literary creation to his culture and historical background. Both the Employment of mythological archetypes and sacred scripture achieve great success and influence in combining the magic elements and reality.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, Toni Morrison tends to adopt the multi-point of view in narration in her works, and Mo Yan applies the changing point of view, a combination of second-person narrative and third-person narrative. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the past and the present can be found in both novels, but in different ways. As a key feature of magic realism, symbolism plays a very important role in *Beloved* and *BBWH*. In addition, the employment of mythological archetypes and sacred scripture can also be found in the novels. Through analysis, I find the main characteristics of magic realism and how it is applied to literal works: narrative skills, symbols, and archetypes. Though originated from Latin America, Toni Morrison successfully adds African-American elements into the magic realistic writing, and Mo Yan makes it even more Chinese. We can see a clear clue about the transmission and worldliness from the similarities between *Beloved* and *BBWH*. More importantly, the tiny difference from the form to the content depicts an even more diversified literary world. Probably magic realism is no longer suitable for describing Morrison and Mo Yan’s writing, which has been denied them publicly. I suggest using a more neutral word, “hallucinatory,” since it is not used specifically to refer to Gabriel Garcia Marquez and his literary world; however, it shows a strong connection to the “Menglong” (朦朧) Chinese literary style.

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