

FLOWER PATTERNS: POETIC WRITING OF FEMALE BODIES BY HAI NAN

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Abstract: In the novel *Flower Patterns*, Hai Nan is concerned about the growth process from a girl to a woman of the three heroines in her unique female perspective with strong personal color and special artistic charm. The article interprets the poetic writing of female bodies by Hai Nan through three aspects: the bodily bloom, the spiritual growth and poetics symbols.

Keywords: Hai Nan; *Flower Patterns*; Body; Spirit; Poetics Symbols

As a woman writer, Hai Nan ventured into the private inner world of women in her novels, displayed their special life experience and expressed the growth of women's desire in poetic language. It was the revolutionary beginning of Chinese women's writing for Hai Nan to express women's subjective consciousness and their dark and silent world for thousands of years clearly and vividly. Whether in Hai Nan's fictions or in other women's works since 1990s, *Flower Patterns* was a unique and representative one.

1. *Flower Patterns*: the Bloom of Female Bodies

Hai Nan named the novel *Flower Patterns* as "the growth history of female bodies" which was the subject that girls changed into women during each period, so she described the girl and woman in this way: "the girls were beginning to prepare their bodies as a container for any burden, such as physical secrets in a vase, delicate and energetic intimacies in the fantasy in a mirror. And for women, they showed their bodies covered with flower patterns to face the lives which were the layers of fog around them. In the upper part of the novel, curly body began to jump forward to play, and every girl practiced this skill. And in the lower part, women had found their own body poetics and a historical perspective from habits, thoughts, fears, motivation and expectations."¹

It was easy for most private fictions to describe sex scene when they wrote the bodies, as if they could stand alone setting the spirit and soul aside, but the bodies in Hai Nan's novel had a solid foundation, which was endless soul-searching. In this novel, the rich connotation of the bodies started with

better understanding for the girls, and its formal appearance started with her knowledge of their own nudity as well as others, for examples, the Xiao Yu's covered with bubbles in the bath, the mother's when she made sex with a man, the Wu Dou-dou's taking off her clothes finally before going to bed, and the charming one of Mi Mi. Hai Nan considered that women became naked only in two cases: the one was facing to oneself; the other one was facing to a man. In the first case, women always faced their own nudities when they began to survey themselves and they found that the undressing voices were just like the spring breeze blowing over the leaves. Women took off their clothes one by one not in order to take a bath or go to bed nakedly. They found the flower patterns of their bodies when they surveyed and touched their own nudities through the mirror in the moment of the night and bathing, and began to know themselves from the bodies, which were so poetic from the spiritual to the physical. [1]A woman in her lifetime will experience two different meanings of her naked body, one for herself, and the other one for men, and whatever it showed the maturity of their spirits into bodies.

Although there have been many works which were famous for writing the physical since 1990s, in order to express the satisfaction of physical desires they are full of bodies and sexes without any shackles of the spirits. It is the difference between Hai Nan and other female writers that she has given the body a formal name and let them appear naturally. In her novel *Flower Patterns*, Wu Dou-dou slept nakedly after lights-out every day, which laid a foundation for the quick combination with Jane in the future, so the sacrifice of her body was natural. A woman dared to open her body only when she could face up to her own bodies. In this novel Hai Nan showed us the poetic beauty on a woman's body by appearance of Xiao Yu. She wrote it in this way: the two breasts were like growing sunflowers which gold-yellow petals opened slightly, and she saw a flower pattern from there. The nudity of model Mi Mi was full of energy and passion which was like a kind of a flower pattern of youth, and it was a pure beauty like a poem and a picture without any blasphemies and desires.

2. *Flower Patterns*: the Growth of Female spirits

The flower patterns bloomed on the female bodies, documented not only the growth process of their bodies but also their spirits. The changes from a girl to a woman was not only limited to the physical "flower patterns" in bloom, but also showed spiritual "flower patterns" in maturation. It was the process like flowers from sentimental buds to the bloom of beauty.

In *Flower Patterns*, three heroines who were inexperienced on campus, longing for beautiful loves with pure souls, started their first loves in different ways. The first love of Xiao Yu was simple and bitter. When she first saw the sexual scenes between her mother and a man, she found the flower patterns on her mother's body, and began to fantasize. For an ignorant girl, the naked sex was like a bomb damaged her whole world, then "She first began to feel afraid of anything." When she decided to sacrifice her body and found Kai's betrayal, the flower patterns branded on her body for the first time. At the moment, "flower patterns" were her painful wounds, not only bloomed in her body, but also rooted in the depths of her mind, so Xiao Yu must learn to accept the spiritual suffering. This is a piece of invisible love to prepare for her youth like the ripples from a calm lake. From then on, Xiao Yu learned to face the society and the reality. When she met the dentist and uncle WU, she could take her time to choose and give up, to bear and to face calmly, which was the "flower patterns" in her spiritual growth. The car accident became an important turning point in her life because it left a clearly visible flower patterns on her body and also ended her first painful love where she got the experience after being hurt deeply. She recognized that the man was not her whole life, so she no longer gave credence to the men's lies. She learned that it was important to seize the opportunity which was the only way she would fly with her ideal.

There was envy and jealousy, joy and loss in the girls' love, but they were bleaker than beautiful loves. The growth of each girl was accompanied with the hope and disappointment of love, and it would gently touch her heart and enrich her life experience, only in this way their individual consciousness would rise and their hearts would grow. Though some were enriched little by little, and some were completed in an instant like a tempest, "flower patterns" in bloom were accompanied with the spiritual growth.

3. *Flower Patterns*: Poetics Symbols of Female Bodies

"I felt that I began to build the poetics symbols of female bodies as soon as I was writing and captured the beauty which emitted vividly from there. Yes, is that the most poetic allure? Nature is luring our vision, and women are luring men's vision, just like that the thoughts are luring our bodies. But for myself, in addition that I am a woman and bear the vagaries of time with my own body, I was using it to bear the poetics symbols."^[1] It was the novel *Flower Patterns* that Hai Nan interpreted perfectly her understanding of the female bodies.

“Flowers joggled and I saw it. As an image, flowers came to our bodies in a subtle fragrance as if it embedded in it, or our bodies were a kind of flowers as a mosaic symbols. It was a flower pattern which showed the poetics symbols in female bodies.”²² In Hai Nan’s own words, “Poetics symbols” was poetry in the history. As a woman, she could withstand her life experiences and explain the symbol of “flower patterns” in our bodies with a unique female language. “Flower patterns” implied the growth of each person. Flowers bloomed in the female bodies suggesting a kind of passionate desire, and flower patterns rolled over in a woman’s body showing a kind of never-stable and uncompromising metaphor. It waved with the female bodies, flying as a wine in the wind, and displayed it in a primitive darkness.

Flowers were a kind of poetics symbols and only women could bear such mosaic-like symbols by their bodies. “Flower patterns” were the carrier of physical growth, and each appearance of it suggested a turning point of life, and each physical growth was mixed with “flower patterns” in bloom. In the event of a car crash, Wu Dou-dou got many ugly wounds on her face and body, while Xiao Yu said: “I’m not comforting you, Dou-dou, they are not wounds but the ‘flower patterns’.” “Flower patterns” were not just only flower patterns when they appeared to be specific at first and only time in Wu Dou-dou’s body. One day, scars would recede from her face, but the flower patterns recorded her bitter and painful experience. As Simon De Beauvoir said: “as a woman, she was ‘natural’ rather than formed”. There was no physical, psychological or economic fate... ..”²³ She attached such a formation to the “flower patterns” in female bodies, and when they presented it was equal to a revolution for women, where there was only the burden of light and heavy without victory or defeat. Each experience would help women understand men and the world and lighten their souls. Like a recorder, “flower patterns” witnessed every change of women’s bodies, mentalities and spirits. The author felt it by her experience of poetics. In female bodies, “flower patterns” existed everywhere, flashing in the skins of female bodies and looming out of the mirror of their souls. It was bodies that we had ignored or distorted its sweetness. The inner of female bodies was like a “flower patterns”, which was the beginning and the ending of life. Poetics of bodies began to write from the “flower patterns” which carried women’s fates.

Besides bodies, “flower patterns” also existed in other ways. When Xiao Yu went in and out of the old house inhabited by Kai, the author described that old wall: “You will see these cracks in these old walls, you will see the flower patterns in it, you know, they are very good-looking. When I

pass by every day I could look at these flower patterns shined by sunlight, which sometimes look like a peach, and sometimes like a rose, and sometimes like apple blossom, and sometimes like Calendula.” This old wall, not only recorded and told their own history with the mottled flower patterns, but also witnessed the growth of Xiao Yu’s body and soul. Here, Xiao Yu felt and understood it by her own body, and left a poetic memory, and then “flower patterns” became witnesses.

Flower Patterns was a typical text in which Hai Nan spoke poetically by bodies, and we could find its existence in her works, such as “Woman Biography”, “Body Biography” and so on. She said that “the poetic dreams lived in the center of our bodies, lives gave us the consonance, bodies interpreted good stories in rivers in time; the beautiful stories weaved by bodies made lives bloom as flowers with intoxicating fragrance.”^[4] By telling beautiful stories about bodies poetically, the author explored body poetic philosophy, showing its difficult process from the physical access to the spiritual pursuit, so that the heavy flesh became light because it got spiritual. In many works, she let this poetry show endlessly. When the body couldn’t withstand the lightness of life it has to withstand the weight of life. But when this burden was reduced to the poetry, we can see that the body was a beautiful poetics symbol.

Just as what Elena Cixous said: “If you write yourself, you must let people see your body.” To write for women, you must write their bodies which they are proud of. In the preface of *Flower Patterns*, Hai Nan quoted the poet Mandelstam’s poetry as its apothegms: “I was given a body/ and how do I for it? /Facing the only part of my body/in order to have breathing and living a quiet joy/ who do I express gratitude to...” From the beginning, we were into a poetic world, where the female bodies bloomed quietly, and Hai Nan also completed her poetic expression of female bodies.

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