

The Correlation between Poetry and Philosophy from the Perspective of Phenomenology

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Abstract: The debate on the relationship between poetry and philosophy has been going on for a long time in the West, during which many views have been produced, there is both advocating strict separation of the two and trying to integrate poetry and philosophy. However, those attempts are often limited to the position of dualism, and there is always a clear gap between philosophy and poetry. After entering the 20th century, especially under the influence of phenomenology, philosophy itself calls for the unity of subject and object, so the relationship between philosophy and poetry also develops from opposition or mechanical integration to organic integration. Although there are still some dangers in this attempt, its significance to poetry and philosophy needs to be affirmed.

Keywords: Relation between poetry and philosophy; Phenomenology; Heidegger; Merleau-Ponty; Dufrenne

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1. Introduction

After entering the 20th century, there are many different kinds of poetry theories, which can be summarized into two aspects. One is humanism, which attaches importance to the connection between poetry and people's psychology, emotion, social existence, thought, and other aspects. The other is scientism, that is, poetry is also regarded as a kind of science, and the form, structure, mode, and other elements of poetry are studied from a scientific perspective. The latter, such as Russian formalism, new criticism, structuralism, and so on, focuses on highlighting the essence of literature from the literature itself and excavating the internal laws of literature. The former tends to take a broader view, linking literature to disciplines outside of itself, including theoretical views linking poetics to philosophy. Although the idea of a link between poetics and philosophy was promoted mainly by philosophers in the twentieth century, this shows the power of poetry. The value of poetry is not limited to literature, as poetics also has philosophical significance.

2. The history of the relationship between poetry and philosophy

The discussion of the relationship between poetry and philosophy has appeared since ancient Greece. But this discussion is often dualistic antithesis, which shows a confrontation between sensibility and nous, and both sides try to use one to dominate the other. Although in this process, there has been a brief resonance between the two, the two have different ways of presenting, and each plays a role in different areas.

2.1. Separation of poetry and philosophy

The separation of poetry and philosophy includes not only the view that denies poetry from the perspective of philosophy but also the theory which defines the respective fields of poetry and philosophy and promotes the common development of both.

The exaltation of philosophy and the disparagement of poetry were particularly evident in ancient Greece. As a representative of this proposition, Plato insisted on the expulsion of poets from the ideal state, "Be aware that the only poetry we can accept into our city is hymns to the gods and verses in praise of good men. If you accept the honeyed Muse, in song or poetry, pleasure, and pain will be twin kings in your city in place of established custom and the thing which has always been generally accepted as best-reason" ^[1]. The qualified poems in his eyes must have a certain social utility, so he only left those poems with educational significance and praise of God and regarded those poems that are regarded as literature and art in modern times as the blasphemy of gods and heroes, and the irrational demagoguery of the people. It can be seen that poetry is excluded from rationality and denounced because of its fictionality. Plato tried to rule man's existence through nous, and so did most philosophers in ancient Greece, trying to find the origin of the world from the point of view of science and mathematics. Under the influence of this view, an obvious boundary emerged between poetry and philosophy.

There is also a voice that advocates the separation of poetry and philosophy, which believes that poetry should strive for its survival status. In ancient Greece, poetry, with the efforts of many creators, responded to the criticism of rationalism by reflecting on beauty and human nature. In "Adis, You May Believe", "Now she shines among Lydian women/as after sunset/the rosy-fingered moon/surpasses all the stars, and her light reaches/equally across the salt sea/and over meadows steeped in flowers./Lucent dew pours out profusely/on blooming roses,/on frail starflowers and florid honey clover." ^[2]. Sappho was not to embody the brilliance and profundity of nous, but merely to bring us a feeling of feminine beauty, just like Aphrodite. In the Middle Ages, Knight Lyric and narrative poetry opened up the ideal and lyrical field for poetry under the suppression of Church Literature by describing worldly life, elegant love, and inner activities. The most famous is Walter's *The Song of the Breaking Dawn*, whose lines depict with fervor the unorthodox but unusually sincere love between a knight and a lady. At the end of the poem, the strong emotion of this line comes straight out, in defiance of religious repression. Through lyrical poetry, the author writes the most primitive freedom of humans, making poetry out of the shackles of the church and opening up its effective field. Then in the eighteenth century, after Kant's distinction between theoretical rationality and moral rationality, between noumenon and phenomenon, a great gulf formed between sensibility and reason. Especially after the collapse of Enlightenment Ideals, the line between poetry and philosophy is even clearer. The Romantics moved literature, especially poetry, from a reflection of the mind to the other side of philosophy that represented reason. They attach great importance to personal perceptual experience

and express bright and strong personal feelings with gorgeous language and complicated techniques. Wordsworth believed that poetry is the natural expression of strong emotions; Coleridge, on the other hand, used the power of imagination to create a mysterious romance; Robert Southey is also known for his lyrical narrative poems full of bizarre images.

Therefore, whether it is to expel poetry because of the irrationality of poetry, or to devote themselves to poetry focusing on sensibility for various reasons, it is a binary opposing position that clearly divides philosophy and poetry. In this type of view, poetry and philosophy develop in their own respective fields, and each becomes the ideal and spiritual sustenance of people with different beliefs.

Poetry as an instrument of philosophy

Taking poetry as an instrument of philosophy essentially denies the individuality of poetry and poetry's literariness, making literature a part of philosophy. The best manifestation of this type is the Church Literature of the Middle Ages, which makes poetry a tool for the spread of religious philosophy. The Church Literature of this period is obviously not religious literature with religious content as the theme or doctrinal thought as the theme, but literature that passively accepts the rule of philosophy and loses its literariness and freedom. This kind of relationship between poetry and philosophy can be regarded as the most preliminary integration of poetry and philosophy, but this integration is negative. In the Middle Ages in Europe, Christianity became the ruler of all disciplines, which resulted in the Christian philosophical system represented by Neo-Platonism and scholasticism. This philosophy requires that all art is at the service of religion, such as advocating doctrine, praising God, and extolling saints and ascetics in a dreamy and romantic atmosphere. Among them, poetry should be far from the secular, "must be copied from the Psalms of the Old Testament... It involves prayer, intercession, meditation, giving thanks, Thanksgiving, pleading, confession, praise, prophecy, and revelation."^[3]

Church Literature in the Middle Ages has its historical basis and necessity for existence. Because of the characteristics of poetry and the mystical characteristics of religious philosophy, some of the poems of Church Literature still have high aesthetic value, such as the narrative poem *Andres*, which is called "Beowulf of Christianity" for its exquisite description of the sea. But, as Thomas Stearns Eliot puts it, "The Bible has had a literary influence on English literature, not because it has always been regarded as literature, but because it has always been regarded as the transmission of the Word of God." Poetry among the purest Church Literature has few aesthetic features of literature, and for the most part, is merely an adjunct to religion.

2.2. Poems that embody philosophical ideas

The embodiment of philosophy in poetry is different from the Church Literature that uses poetry as a tool of philosophy. The latter lacks the characteristics of literature, while the former represents the attempt to take philosophy as the content of poetry, which is an active and active attempt to integrate poetry with philosophy, such as the philosophical themes in the poetry of the Renaissance; the attention to both rational and metrical in the poetry of Classical Period, although it aimed at serving the absolute monarchy, and the further progress in exalting reason and depressing sensibility in the poetry of Enlightenment Period.

During the Renaissance, literature broke through the shackles of Church Literature with rationality, human rights, and individual liberation. Therefore, poetry often not only showed romantic literariness and emotional personality experience but also integrated humanism into it, emphasizing

the power of knowledge. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* is the best example of this, which not only uses ornate diction and mature poetic techniques but also contains a variety of complex ideas. In the period of Classicism, due to the conclusion of visual illusion drawn by Descartes, the reason represented by *cogito* became the standard of human survival and understanding of the world. This led to a further development of expressing philosophy or reason in poetry. John Milton's long poem *Paradise Lost* shows the revolutionary power of humanism and the importance of knowledge and labor in a vigorous style and metaphor. It is also a religious subject, but compared with church literature, its literary characteristics are more prominent because of rhetoric, imagination, emotion, and so on. In the Enlightenment Period, Schiller, Goethe, and others retained the sensibility of poetry in their works, while also embedding their philosophical ideas in them. *Faust* is filled with fiction and imagination, but at the same time, the image of Faust has a critical and dialectical spirit and shows the idea of humanism.

In general, this type of poetry embodies the positive connection between poetry and philosophy and shows the power of reason in its content while retaining the literariness and sensibility of the poetry. However, in the view of structuralist criticism, this type of poetry still ignores the importance of internal techniques or structures in literature. This kind of poetry only discusses philosophic thinking in terms of content, which is not an organic relation between poetry and philosophy.

3. The relation between poetry and philosophy in phenomenology

In the 19th century, with the problem of the huge gap between sensibility and reason left by Kant, philosophers have been trying to bridge it by various means, but the problem still exists. G.W.F Hegel saw the possibility of combining poetics and philosophy, that is, sensibility and reason. Although nowadays Hegel's theory is criticized for its objective idealism of absolute spirit, his aesthetic combined poetry and reason, which provided a hint for the organic fusion of poetry and philosophy in the twentieth century. And in the subsequent twentieth century, this spirit of fusion of sensibility and reason was carried forward and stripped of its metaphysical meaning by phenomenology. Therefore, the relation between poetry and philosophy in the 20th century is no longer the superposition of literary form and content of reason, it can achieve the perceptual intuition in Husserl's words, and bring an organic combination of poetry, even poetry in a broad sense and philosophy.

3.1. Heidegger: Poetry becomes the source of truth

Heidegger was deeply influenced by Husserl. Although Husserl didn't devote himself to literature studies, his theory of perceptual intuition did have an impact on Heidegger. Heidegger changed perceptual intuition into seeing the world from the changing earth, and directly perceiving the *Dasein* of humans from all the poetic arts.

Heidegger regarded art as the source of truth and let the concept of poetry be extended to all art, believing that man should have a poetic dwelling. He even argues that "the impulse toward the work lies like truth as one of truth's distinctive, possibilities by which it can itself occur as being in the midst of beings."^[4] He saw that in the age of the distrust of God, people who examine the source of the world are always in the contradictory cycle of the mutual interpretation of the two sides of dualism, just as the work and the writer are the source of each other. Poetry uses language that has the function of naming and communicating to rip the phenomenal world and build the bridge to the real

Sein so that people can glimpse the truth. In this way, poetry is no longer limited to a literary genre but becomes what Heidegger calls poetic in all arts. He regarded all art as poetry, and people should also return to poetic dwelling. The “poetic” here represents a horizon of overlooking, which is to complete the off-cover of truth through “language.” Other arts, such as painting, sculpture, architecture, and so on, can reflect the field of the world through the transformation of the earth, show the conflict between the world and the earth, and then show one unique image of the existence of truth. Therefore, Heidegger’s poetics is actually a theory about poetic art. It does not discuss the literariness of poetry, nor a simple superposition of philosophy and poetry, it is at a higher level than the form and content, completes the manifestation of hidden *Sein*.

Heidegger did not regard poetry as a mouthpiece of philosophy or a tool of information transmission, he believed that poetry was *Sein* itself, which could only allow people to “return home” at the spiritual level. Heidegger does not advocate the use of poetry to convey philosophic thinking, he believes that poetry itself is a form of philosophy. Poetry and philosophy have reached an organic combination, and poetry has not lost its literariness. However, Heidegger limited himself to the spiritual level, explored the origin of *Sein* through poetry, and guided the human spirit to material beings. Although this neutralized the disadvantages of subjectification that Husserl fell into to avoid the tendency of objectification, it also made poetry equal to material beings, “failing to fully reveal the particularity of literature and art as things, and even causing them to fall into the situation of being swallowed up”^[5]. At the same time, he also gave poetry an unprecedented status, and it is this extreme confidence in poetry that leads to the pursuit of the spirit, the sublime, and the neglect of the body.

3.2. Merleau-Ponty: The literaturization of philosophy

Based on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty pays more attention to the basis of the physical level of being, and because of the discussion of the visible and the invisible, he believes that philosophy is also a kind of literature. Heidegger took an overlooking perspective to care about the *Sein* from the spiritual level and ignored the survival of human beings in the world. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty borrowed from Husserl’s life-world and believed that only the body exists in the world and keeps independence can truly discover the truth of the world. With the development of his thought, Merleau-Ponty soon noticed the contradiction of this mutual interpretation and established the common substrate of the body and the world through the concept of *la chair*.

When discussing language, Merleau-Ponty noticed that expression is full of poetic features. His expounding on the relationship between the visible and the invisible is actually to advocate a metaphorical expression, which is also a broader poetic. In his view, philosophy “is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to the expression”^[6]. That is to say, silence is the pure form of the idea and contains all the possibilities of words, when the silent cogito becomes speech, the idea acquires its flesh. Meaning and language are one, idea is not on top of language, so language becomes the flesh of thought and idea. The same is true of other arts such as painting, music, and so on, and the analysis of these arts or philosophies is really to talk about the metaphors behind them. In short, Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor makes philosophy also possess a poetic feature, and this characteristic is not a means to be adopted for some functional purpose but is a characteristic of philosophy itself, is the flesh that philosophy itself must rely on as the substrate for moving from silent and ambiguous thoughts to manifestation.

Merleau-Ponty also replaced the transcendental value philosophy with a philosophy of meaning,

dividing literature according to greatness rather than style. He valued expression more than genre, because “expression (language, for example) is entirely what we have most personally, and at the same time it is open to others, which gives it universality” [7]. This means that, through expression, we can visualize the meaning of universal value, and expression is not limited by the medium or genre. But this is not to give up the poem, but to make the language of the poem further ambiguous, not only breaking down the boundary in the form but also breaking the barrier between styles or genres. Because the language of art is metaphorical, literature, even non-literary art, is also metaphorical as long as it is created in a language that is the flesh of the invisible world. It is not difficult to see that Merleau-Ponty attached great importance to painting, just because painting, as flesh, has more visibility than literature. In this way, the language of philosophy also belongs to metaphorical poetic language, and the relationship between poetry and philosophy is further integrated, also, the boundary between poetry and philosophy became blurred. Although Merleau-Ponty’s view is based on philosophy itself, it does not mean that he regards poetic language as a tool. On the contrary, in his view, poetry and philosophy are equal. If silent cogito wants to communicate with the world, one of its forms to choose is poetry. Thus, based on Heidegger’s Poetic, it can be seen that the abolition of genre makes poetry further become a mode of expression. In this fusion of poetry and philosophy, neither of them will lose their characteristics, nor will poetry be overly concerned with its internal form.

Merleau-Ponty endows this poetic expression with physical meaning, so the body has the greatness of metaphor. Thanks to his blurring of stylistic boundaries, Heidegger’s pursuit of spiritual existence sinks into the body. Although the body is not being itself, it carries a transcendental connotation. Merleau-Ponty’s Incarnation means that the spiritual philosophical pursuit represented by poetry is replaced by the physical experience represented by prose. Since Hegel, poetry has always represented sublimity and creativity at the spiritual level, while prose is synonymous with the “mediocre” physical experience, thus the duality of poetry and prose has been formed, and the way to pursue and create the meaning of life through the body has been canceled. But Merleau-Ponty eliminated this duality and reshaped the criteria for judging poetry and prose. Because of the nature of being in the world, the possibility of the body approaching the truth is also released. Poetry, which becomes an expression, qualifies the body to be an expression. The body becomes the incarnation of the world and also becomes a metaphorical poem. So we can see that this combination of poetry and philosophy in Merleau-Ponty leads to the body itself, overcoming the problem that Heidegger’s poetic dwelling is only limited to the spirit.

3.3. Dufrenne: The unique role of poetry in philosophy

Dufrenne considers the relationship between poetry and philosophy from the perspective of aesthetics. Unlike Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, he does not discuss what kind of philosophical thinking poetry or art can bring to people but applies the methodology of phenomenology to aesthetics to study how aesthetic experience works. “The aesthetic object is nothing but a work of art that is perceived for the sake of itself” [8]. That is to say, aesthetic objects include two interwoven parts: works and aesthetic perception. So, the role that phenomenology should play in aesthetic criticism is to make criticism return to the work and explore the choice of the suitable subject contained in the work. We should also adopt a neutral aesthetic attitude to open ourselves to the works. He also focuses on the intentional ontology of the work, going back to the roots of the work rather than the shaping of the author or the reader.

From the aesthetic point of view, he affirmed the power of emotional literary language. “It is in the same expressive function that language establishes its rationality and poetry. Rationality is its ability to express logic, poetry is its ability to express power.”^[9] In the interpretation of works, especially poetry, language is the meaning itself. And because of the ambiguity of the meaning, poetry becomes a superlinguistic expression. So the meaning of literature, especially the meaning of poetry, is the meaning of sensibility. In this regard, Dufrenne inherited the perceptual and intuitive view of the phenomenology tradition and therefore inherited the organic integration of poetry and philosophy from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

Dufrenne used the phenomenological method to investigate poetry and found that poetry plays a unique role in philosophy. “The poem expresses those things that are difficult to explain: the pre-human nature, the depth, thickness, and potency of being”, he said^[9]. Dufrenne made poetry sharply demarcated from prose again, and delineated the field expressed by both without bias: poetry expresses the original *being* of man, and prose expresses the power of man’s own being. Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty extended and blurred the definition of poetry, which is a philosophically holistic perspective, but poetry gradually lost its original form as a kind of literature in this ambiguous theory. Dufrenne made this concept clear again, poetry is still the source of being and retains its literary form.

Dufrenne also put his poetry into practice, which is reflected in the Treatise on Pinda. He criticized poetry from the perspective of literature and saw the theme of light and life in Pindar’s poems from the relationship between the image and the theme. Thus, he says, “Pindar never extols society for its own sake, but only when it is combined with the potential and brilliance of nature”^[9]. That is, in the poetry, the discussion of society is often presented in a way that highlights the image of nature. He also saw the effect of poetry on stimulating perception, by arousing the imagination to explore the possibilities of reality. According to this, in his criticism of poetry, poetry acquires more literariness, and he revealed how poetry is organically integrated with philosophy as a specific work.

4. An analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the relation between poetry and philosophy

Philosophers in the 20th century realized that the combination of poetry and philosophy in the past was mechanistic, and began to treat poetry and philosophy in a more dialectical way, making the combination a truly organic way. Just like Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the body and the world, only by adopting an attitude that is neither overlooking nor immersing oneself can poetry and philosophy interweave without becoming each other. Despite the distinct advantages of the twentieth-century experiments, these methods still present certain dangers to poetry.

4.1. Advantages

The connection between poetry and philosophy means the connection between sensibility and reason, and its advantages lie in the integration of theory to counter the split between sensibility and reason, the meaning of poetry can be better spread, and philosophy can break through the metaphysical shackles.

Firstly, the combination of poetry and philosophy helps to combat dualism. Those views on the combination of poetry and philosophy, which was mentioned in the second part of this paper, were based on phenomenology whose fundamental objective is to unite the two sides of the opposition. This effort means that poetry and philosophy are no longer opposite like sensibility and reason, nor is

the traditional superposition which was founded mechanically, but are truly interwoven maintaining their fields. It is precisely this connection between poetry and philosophy that leads to the distinction between poetry and other humanities and solves the problem of “the end of art” put forward by Hegel.

Secondly, the combination of poetry and philosophy improves the value of poetry. Formalism makes poetry confined to literature, while structuralism makes poetry become a game of language. However, to play a role in history, literature, especially poetry, needs both literariness and thought. Even Eliot thought that great poetry should also have universally accepted philosophical thinking. The integration of poetry and philosophy in phenomenology confirms the great power of reason contained in poetry and greatly promotes the importance of poetry by demonstrating that poetry gives the possibility to understand our being. This also provides a chance for the development of poetry which is on the decline in the current culture of deconstructivism.

Finally, the poetic philosophy makes philosophy break the shackles established by metaphysics. Poetry represents a metaphor and expresses the invisible thoughts by visible images, including both *contigo* and physical experience. Philosophy is connected with sensibility, especially in the views of Merleau-Ponty and Dufrenne, the overview is excluded, and the interweaving of poetic form and philosophical thought is realized through aesthetic perception. Therefore, this avoids the separation between man and the world, so that people can fully understand their being.

4.2. The danger of the connection between poetry and philosophy

The relationship between poetry and philosophy is still in danger, and excessive bias on either side will lead to the crisis of poetry or philosophy.

If we emphasize philosophy a lot, the organic combination of poetry and philosophy will become a philosophical interpretation of poetry, which turns poetry from the source of truth into the tool of truth. This problem usually occurs when poetry is discussed from a philosophical point of view because a perspective of philosophy usually causes the objectification of poetry. Although it does not mean that poetry becomes an object in *contigo*, only means that it exists as an object to be examined to help philosophy to manifest itself and poetry is therefore transformed into a tool for expression. Therefore, poetry’s literariness has been weakened or even canceled, and its internal structure, rhythm, and other skills have been melted in the extension of philosophy. Therefore, in the integration of philosophy and poetry, the form or the literariness of poetry is also an important aspect, because it is how philosophy expresses itself through aesthetics.

Similarly, if poetry is overemphasized, philosophy will become one of the themes of poetry. This kind of danger usually occurs in the exploration of the relationship between poetry and philosophy based on literature itself, and will also return the combination of poetry and philosophy to the past mechanical combination because of the relegation of philosophy to the content of poetry. Therefore, when dealing with this danger, researchers should not only focus on the content of the poem but also pay attention to philosophical thinking.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between poetry and philosophy has been a hot issue in both literature and philosophy since ancient times. After the binary opposition in the past, the relationship between poetry and philosophy gradually moved towards fusion and gradually moved from mechanical

integration to interweaving. The trend of integration between poetry and philosophy is irresistible. Even with the popularity of the current deconstructive culture, the physical parts in some poems have become secular or even vulgar, even though the poetry written in words has gradually declined due to the development of technology and the variety of sensory stimulation. However, great classic works always have powerful forms as well as ideas, which is the truth proved by literature practice since ancient times. The connection between poetry and philosophy is the trend of literature, it provides the possibility of poetry development under the change of contemporary spiritual and technological environment and the trend of multi-disciplines.

Disclosure statement

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