

## On Literary and Aesthetic Connotations of Yang Xiong's “Expelling Poverty”

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### Abstract

“Expelling Poverty” is an ingenious short dialogue-style fu (rhapsody), a valuable content and form exploration with unique artistic and aesthetic value. Yang Xiong is not limited to the range of material selection and expression conventions of traditional literature. He is good at absorbing nutrients from folk culture and real life, giving his works a vivid language flavor and humorous artistic effect. After a fierce ideological struggle, the author finally chose between pursuing fame and wealth and living in poverty and contentment, creating a distinct creative image full of philosophical meaning.

### Keywords

Yang Xiong; Short Fu; Expelling Poverty; Writing as Game; Aesthetic Connotations.

### 1. Introduction

Yang Xiong's “Expelling Poverty”[1] created a new field of poetry about poverty with unique literary and aesthetic connotations. The fu (“rhapsody” in Chinese, the same below) creates a new area of poetry about poverty. It uses personification techniques, the technique of “wisdom between the lines” to introduce “The Poetry” into the fu, turn “The Poetry” into words, and use carnival-style “humorous words” to dissolve the dignity and dignity of the ruling class at that time, and use a dialogue style to write about the author's choice between the temptation of fame and fortune and the pursuit of lofty ideals. This article intends to explore its literary and aesthetic implications from multiple aspects.

### 2. “Expelling Poverty” Creates a New Field of Poetry about Poverty

Yang Xiong, courtesy name Ziyun, was born in the first year of Ganlu (53 BC) of Emperor Xuan of the Western Han Dynasty and died in the fifth year of Tianfeng (18 AD) of Wang Mang's New Dynasty. As a native of Chengdu, Shu County, Western Han Dynasty, he was a famous poet after Sima Xiangru. After he was forty-two years old, he traveled to the capital, Chang'an (modern Xi'an, the capital of Shannxi Province). He was summoned by Wang Yin, the chariot and cavalry general of the Grand Sect, as a disciple of his sect, who recommended him to be the imperial edict. The following year, he was advised by Yangzhuang, a native of Shu (modern Sichuan province). He was summoned to the court by Emperor Cheng of the Han Dynasty, who loved poetry and was appointed as the Minister of Huangmen. Yang Xiong's official position has always been low, and he did not move to official functions during the years of Emperors Cheng, Ai, and Ping. When Wang Mang was in power, he was the official of Tianlu Pavilion, and his official title was Zhongsan Dafu.

Yang Xiong had insisted on “pursuing the abundance of the inner world instead of pursuing fame and fortune, but people at the time ignored him.” [2] He did not wholly give up writing fu. He gave up the flashy grand fu, replacing it with new ideas, material selection, and language

style in creating short fu, striving for innovation and breakthrough. Hard work paid off, and the ideological realm and aesthetic connotations of his short fu, such as "Explanation of Mockery," "Justification Against Ridicule," "Justification Against Difficulties," and "Expelling Poverty," have reached new heights, opening up new territories for the creation of later generations of lyrical works.

It is worth noting that this short poem pioneered a writing method in literary creation that transformed abstraction into concreteness and used "humorous words and ridiculous words" to express one's thoughts. Qian Zhongshu believes this short fu has a novel idea, a self-contained chapter, and absurd and vivid language. It is interesting to read, and its literary and artistic value exceeds Yang Xiong's other fu. In nearly 1,800 characters, Qian Zhongshu sorted out and evaluated more than 20 essays, episodes, or poems about poverty since Yang Xiong and traced the transformation of "Poverty" from "poor ghost" to "poor divinity" and then the image evolution process from "five ghosts" to "woman," from "harmful thing" to "victim." [3]

This short fu is the poem's beginning about chanting poor prose, and later generations imitated it in various variations to satirize the contemporary world. Since the Six Dynasties, many articles have used objects to personify people. Han Yu's "Sending the Poor," Liu Zongyuan's "Begging for Skills," and Sun Qiao's "Chasing the Ghosts" are all famous ones. However, their creative roots are still similar to "Expelling Poverty". It coincides with each other, and no one is right. The recent scholar Lu Kanru's "Chronological History of Medieval Literature" believes that "Expelling Poverty" was written by Wang Mang in the fourth year of the founding of the People's Republic of China, when Yang Xiong was sixty-five years old. [4]

### 3. Analysis of the Literary and Aesthetic Implications of "Expelling Poverty"

This short poem attempts to promote before suppressing, setting a target first and then refuting it, making the glory and wealth seem insignificant and ridiculous in the eyes of ordinary people. "Poverty" and "Me" view things from different values, and the same thing forms a strong contrast, producing funny and humorous effects. This is a "carnival" of language. "Expelling Poverty" contains severe and profound thinking amidst light humor. It conducts valuable explorations in content and form, shortens the distance between it and readers, and arouses deep resonance among readers. From this perspective, Yang Xiong's short poems in his later years are more humanistic.

#### 3.1. To set a target first and then refute it

"Expelling Poverty" uses the dialogue between "Poverty" and "Me" to criticize some people who have forgotten their original intentions and lost their way, condemns the dissolute and immoral "the end of the dynasty," and calls for a wise king who governs the country with frugality. Yang Xiong believes wealth often goes hand in hand with evil; being content with poverty and enjoying life often brings political clarity, while pursuing fame and fortune leads to disaster for the country and the people. This short fu has risen from a personal quest to the realm of concern for his country and the people, which endow "Expelling Poverty" with a more profound critical significance.

The author adopts the method of promoting desire first and suppressing it and establishes the image of a self-righteous person who appears to be a scholar but is a wretched person who is greedy for fame and fortune. He scolded "Poverty", deliberately tried to expel "Poverty", and imitated the tone and posture of the snob. However, from the point of view of "Poverty", his ancestors had always been with saintly kings such as Emperor Yao, who respected virtue and were thrifty. However, aspiring high-ranking scholars had retreated far away from the extravagant and lustful kings of the last days, who were full of wine and meat. "Poverty" has

always followed Yang Xiong, bringing him “a mountain of blessings and wealth.” “Poverty” said he had a clear conscience and complained that “I” did not know what was good or evil. The salary and wealth are piling up like a mountain. Forget about my great virtues and think about my minor grievances.” Then, it was explained that the ancestors of “Poverty” assisted the emperor with virtuous virtues, but the original intention of “love and Ji Shi” was not there. The emperor built many construction projects and often hunted in the fields, which consumed much national power and people's power; illegal officials were corrupt and corrupt, social conflicts intensified; relatives and eunuchs monopolized power, and capable people kept silent to protect themselves. This made Yang Xiong sad and lamented that the world's end was approaching.

Yang Xiong was obsessed with studying literature, philosophy, philology, and other aspects. He was not interested in getting promoted to an official position and was not good at managing friendships. As a result, “his family was poor, and he was a drunkard, so people wanted to come to his door” [5]. Although Yang Xiong had been the emperor for three generations and had a low status, he had the opportunity to witness various situations at the top of the palace for a long time. Wang Tingxiang of the Ming Dynasty said: “Greed is the foundation of all evil; lack of desire is the foundation of all good.”[6] “Expelling Poverty” was written out of emotion and feeling. It expresses the author's pursuit of sticking to poverty, keeping integrity, and living alone. It also satirizes Emperor Cheng, Emperor Ai, Emperor Ping, and Wang Mang's dissoluteness, immaturity, and incompetence. He has long left behind his ancestors' virtue of diligent and thrifty management of the country and peace. He seems to have foreseen the decline of the new dynasty.

According to Wang Chong's “Lost Articles” of “Lunheng”: “Yang Xiong said that when he wrote “Exemplary Sayings (Fa Yan), “a rich man in Shu gave tens of millions of money and wanted to record him in the book. Yang Xiong refused him and said: “The rich with unbenevolent behavior is just like a deer or an ox without mercy in the pen. How can I record it casually?” [7] Wang Qing said in “Yang Xiong's Critical Biography,” “Yang Xiong's lifestyle is based on political success as the only value of intellectuals. The standard of Chinese feudal society is essential, which regards knowledge as the cornerstone of a person's livelihood and pursues it tirelessly throughout his life. For this reason, he does not hesitate to abandon wealth, utility, and fame in the world and endures a lifetime of loneliness and poverty. This kind of person who dedicated his life to exploring knowledge had never reached this state before Yang Xiong.” [8]

### 3.2. Seriousness and depth in light humor

In “Expelling Poverty,” the dialogue between “Poverty” and “Me” is conducted in ridiculing and humorous language. The philosophical meaning of dialogue refers to consultation and discussion between both parties based on equal status. Although “I” hate “Poverty” and even blame him for my poverty and sorrow, “There is nothing wrong with me. It's all your fault!” But “I” do not regard him as an enslaved person, rather than breaking up with the childhood sweetheart. “I” speak plausibly, pursuing promotions and promotions, eating, drinking, and having fun with fair-weather friends. Still, in the eyes of “Poverty,” this is all to express “small grudges” and forget the “virtue” of “Poverty”. In the eyes of “Poverty,” the inadequacy that “I” suffered is simply an endless blessing as if it is a gift from God: living in poverty and happiness and living an open and honest life is the life pursuit of an actual celebrity.

By comparing the dialogues between the two, we found that there is a one-to-one isomorphic relationship. In the eyes of “I”, the friends who follow the crowd and the officials who occupy vacant positions and live in vain are “a group of greedy for wealth.” They are the same as tyrants, thieves, and Greedy scum. Similarly, the Taoist philosophy of interdependence between misfortune and fortune made him look down on fame and fortune. The rapid changes in the political arena during the reign of Emperor Ai made Yang Xiong believe in this philosophy of

life. According to Wang Qing's "Critical Biography of Yang Xiong", in the court, Yang witnessed a series of examples of misfortunes and fortunes: Li Xun was involved in Xia Heliang's incident and was exempt from the death penalty and demoted to Dunhuang County; Zhu Bo was promoted step by step until he became prime minister, but was forced to commit suicide by imperial order a few months later during the reign of Emperor Ai; Dong Xian was once the most favored and powerful, but when Emperor Ai died, Dong Xian and his wife were forced to commit suicide. [9]

"Poverty" makes fun of Yang Xiong: "Those thieves and corrupt officials will never bother you. They must lock the door several times before they dare to sleep, but you can sleep in the open air without fear. They are always worried, but you live so freely." [10] Such words are not simple ridicule. After being refuted by "Poverty" confidently, he thinks he is right. "I" has become small and ridiculous, while "Poverty", who was once despised by "me" has become taller. At this point, readers' evaluation of the two has reversed. The two view things with different values and the same thing forms a strong contrast, producing a funny and humorous effect, making the characters in the lower position feel that they are nobler than "me" and can't help but relax and smile. Their rejection of adversity is significantly weakened.

From an aesthetic point of view, "Expelling Poverty" completes the aesthetic transformation from humble (material wealth is lower than that of ordinary people) to noble (spiritual wealth is higher than that of ordinary people), from disgust ("I" hate "Poverty", readers hate "me") to be friendly ("I" likes "Poverty", and the reader, in turn, likes "me"); from sadness ("Poverty" wants to leave "me") to love ("I will obey after hearing the truth," an emotional sublimation), and forms reconciliation at last: "The poverty would stay with me forever."

Yang Xiong's hometown of Sichuan greatly influenced his writing style. "People in Bashu rarely suffer from sorrow but easily have fun." [11] The writing style of "Expelling Poverty" combines gravitas with humor, infiltrating the Shu culture that is good at ridicule and banter. Wen Weng, the founder of the Western Han Dynasty public school, started studying in Shu, and it became a common practice among people to be good at literature and argumentation. Sima Xiangru wrote "Ode to Beauty," Wang Bao wrote "A Harsh Master-slave Contract" and "Responsibility for Bearded Slaves -- Making Fun of the Highs and Lows," Yang Xiong wrote "Expelling Poverty," "Explanation of Mockery" and "Ode to Wine." "Wine Ode" is famous for their humorous style.

### 3.3. Use short fu to overcome the weaknesses of grand fu

By the Yuanyan period of Emperor Cheng of the Han Dynasty, Yang Xiong had already completed "four major grand fu" such as "Rhapsody on the Sacrifice East to Yellow River," "Sweet Springs Palace Rhapsody," "Rhapsody on the Tall Toplars Palace" and "Plume Hunt Rhapsody." However, the language was too elaborate, gorgeous, and exaggerated to cover up the original intention of the satirical remonstrance, which means "there are too many encouraging elements in the poem, which drowns out the satirical and admonishing theme at the end of the chapter, putting the cart before the horse. As a result, the attempt to satirize and persuade has the opposite effect, and it encourages the emperor's extravagant mentality." [12] As recorded in "Yang Xiong's Biography" in "Book of Han": "Yang Xiong believes that fu is used to satirize and admonish. The wonderful and extravagant words, the extravagance and the huge expansion, compete to make it impossible for others to add", and even Yang Xiong regretted his wasting time on the grand fu and promised that he would "never do it again" [13]. Still, in his later years, he wrote some lyrical short fu such as "Explanation of Mockery," "Resolution of Difficulties," "Expelling Poverty," and "Ode to Wine," etc., making valuable explorations in content and form. Adopting material big or small with solemn or humorous language, short fu can shorten the distance to the readers. The dignitaries and the general public can smile knowingly and understand different truths from it. From this perspective, Yang Xiong's short fu in his later years is more humanistic.

There are double contradictions in the content and form of Han fu: first, the contradiction between things (content) and words (language), “when words are better than things, then they lack literary talent; when words are better than things, then they are extravagance; when things are better than words, then suitable and consistent.” [14] Secondly, the contradiction between the author and literature, “Words are the voice of the heart while writing is the painting of the heart. When voices and painting come into shapes, it is easy to distinguish between a gentleman and a villain.” [15] Whether literature conveys the truth or seeks fame and reputation, this is the criterion for judging gentlemen and villains.

In his later years, Yang Xiong treated the writing of short fu with ease. He did not make the deliberate, painstaking efforts to create the four significant grand fu in his middle age. Writing short fu allowed him to write freely, and all his laughter and curses became articles. Xu Fuguan believes that the content of Han fu includes those who show off their talents and those who express their feelings. Yang Xiong's four grand fu belong to the former, which only have wisdom but no emotions; “Anti Lisao,” written in his early years, belongs to the latter, telling the true feelings of misfortune, and it is the author's true feelings of life. [16] “Expelling Poverty,” written in his later years, is a four-character poem that is both solemn and harmonious. It uses short fu to overcome the weakness of grand fu, whose form is more important than its content, and expresses a detached outlook on life, making his works full of care for humanity.

#### 4. Conclusion

Yang Xiong's “Expelling Poverty” has groundbreaking artistic features and profound literary and aesthetic connotations. “Expelling Poverty” uses personification to show the author's inner world, turning the struggle between the ego and the superego into a concrete dialogue and debate scene between “Poverty” and “me”. The article adopts a dialogue style to express the author's ideological struggle between fame, fortune, and lofty ideals and makes the final choice. After experiencing the reigns of the Cheng, Ai, Ping Dynasties and the New Dynasty, Yang Xiong made a conscious decision in literary creation, abandoned the emptiness and glitz of the grand fu, returned to the short fu, and used carnival writing techniques to eliminate the obsolescence of the traditional grand fu. and rigidity, making his works full of vitality and vitality, exuding the warmth of humanity and the brilliance of ideals.

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### **Biography**

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