

A Comparative Study of the Theme of "Martyrdom" in Chinese and Western Literature--Take "Romeo and Juliet", "Liang Zhu", "Paradise Lost" as an Example

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Abstract: The main characters in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Chinese folklore and Yueju opera "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", and Junichi Watanabe's *Paradise Lost* are all martyred because of the contradiction between their personal wills and social realities. But due to the different times and family backgrounds, the writers' understanding of the characters under the same theme and the differences in their performances, the three pairs of main characters also face different times of turbulence and the burden of the yoke. However, due to the different times and family backgrounds, the writers understand and express the characters under the same theme differently, and the three pairs of protagonists also face different turbulence and shackles of the times, which carry the concepts and thoughts of different times and social environments, different countries and cultural traditions as well as different writers.

Keywords: Martyrdom; Comparative Literary Thematics; Love Tragedy; Similarities and Differences

1. Introduction

Martyrdom, as an ancient topic, is an extreme manifestation of love, which is commonplace in both ancient and modern times. In Chinese ancient legends, E Huang and Ying were both martyred because of Shun's departure, followed by Meng Jiangnu's suicide by throwing herself into the sea and Zhu Yingtai's martyrdom in front of the monument, and so on; in Western literature, literature on the subject of martyrdom abounds, such as the martyrdom of Gazimodo in *Notre Dame de Paris*, and the death of Heathcliff by hunger strike in *Wuthering Heights*... This article selects some typical literary works with the

theme of "martyrdom" in ancient and modern times, such as "Romeo and Juliet", "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", "Paradise Lost", and tries to analyze and compare them in order to find out the roots of the tragedy of martyrdom and the contradictions and conflicts between individual will and social reality from ancient times to nowadays. At the same time, we will conduct a study on the theme of "Martyrdom", and trace the influence and manipulation of different social environments and cultural origins on the creation of the works according to the unfolding of different storylines and the portrayal of characters by different writers.

2. Conflict between Individual will and Social Reality

English playwright Shakespeare in "Romeo and Juliet" this play, depicted in the city of Verona, Italy, belonging to the two feuding families Montague and Capulet young man and woman Romeo and Juliet at the ball at first sight, the heroine to escape the family marriage, drank a fake death potion, but in the coincidence of the hero due to unknowing the heartbreak of the man drank poison, the heroine woke up and is not willing to live alone, and finally stabbed a dagger into their chests, both martyrdom, and the two idealistic young people for love, not yielding to fate, struggling in the quagmire of worldly power. The heroine wakes up and does not want to live alone, and finally stabs her own chest with a dagger, both martyred in a tragic story, portraying the image of two idealistic young people who do not succumb to destiny for the sake of love, and struggle and struggle in the quagmire of worldly forces.

The main conflict of the tragedy is the individual will of Romeo and Juliet to pursue free love against the two feuding families, the conflict between humanitarianism and medieval feudal morality, and the

contradiction between the new world and the old world. In this play, the struggle of two incompatible noble families as the background of the story, showing the old world, the old ideas of the framework; and Romeo, Juliet and other people's image is embedded in the new ideas of humanism, Romeo as a humanist youth with high ideals, he was enthusiastic and frank, after hearing the news of Juliet "death After hearing the news of Juliet's "death", he does not hesitate to buy the poison, hoping to die with Juliet. Juliet defied the family feud, in order to love, at the risk of faking death to resist the family marriage. After waking up from "death", she learns that Romeo has already taken the poison, and then she resolutely martyred herself, never to live, valuing love more than life. They hold high the banner of humanitarianism, preaching the liberation of individuality and free love with their actions. Even under the huge gap between the two feuding families, facing the oppression of the family authority, they still dare to rebel against and disobey the orders of their parents, and follow their own happiness at the cost of their lives.

It is no coincidence that in the Yueju Opera "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", a beautiful, bone-chilling and earth-shattering love affair is delicately presented. Zhu Yingtai, who came from a wealthy family, rebelled against the unequal treatment of women in traditional society and fought for the opportunity to study and be educated with men, and fell in love with Liang Shanbo, a commoner's son, in the course of spending time together. However, factors such as parental orders and the difference in family status stood in the way between the two and caused them to be separated. When they meet again, Liang Shanbo realizes that Yingtai has been promised to Ma Wencai, the son of a governor, as his wife. It was too late for Liang Shanbo to repent and he died of grief. On the day of her marriage, Yingtai went to Shanbo's tomb to pay her respects and cried in a touching voice. Suddenly, thunder and lightning and wind and rain broke out and the tomb cracked, so Yingtai jumped into the tomb without hesitation and the tomb was reunited. When the parents rushed to rescue their daughter, two butterflies flew out from the cracks in the stone. This time Yingtai was incarnated for love and was freed forever, and she and

Shanbo were never separated.

Yingtai's pursuit of love, freedom, and resistance to destiny were not tolerated in that authoritarian society where "the father's order is difficult to disobey", "the marriage is decided by the parents". In the eyes of Zhu's father, his daughter's marriage to Ma Wencai, the son of Ma Taishou, as a tool for the family's interest, is the best move, and the love in his daughter's mouth is just a little girl's move, which is not important for the overall situation. In the remake of *Liang Zhu* directed by Tsui Hark in 1994, Tsui Hark added the story of Zhu's mother and Master Ruoxu to his treatment of the role, which can be described as the finishing touch. When Zhu Yingtai's mother was young, she suffered the same fate as Zhu Yingtai. She also disguised herself as a woman and went to the academy, where she fell in love with a young man. Later, unable to overcome the constraints of feudalism, Zhu mother still obeyed her family's arrangement and chose the superior Zhu family. The tragedy of Zhu's mother and Master Ruoxu is a true reflection of that era. At the time of feudalism, children's marriage was the order of their parents, and if they resisted their father's order, they were unfilial, and would be blamed and insulted by thousands of people, which was the order of existence established by generations of people.

Back to the modern times, the literature on the theme of "martyrdom for love" has not come to an end, and in Japanese "martyrdom for love" is a translation of "death of love," and the tragedy of death of love is one of the important The tragedy of love death is one of the most important contents of Japanese literature. Watanabe Junichi's work "Paradise Lost" has made great achievements in recent times. The work mainly narrates a tragic love story in which a married man, Hisagi Shoichiro, who is more than half a hundred years old, and a married woman, Matsubara Rinko, who has an extramarital affair and has a crazy love that remains unswerving until death, commit suicide due to the breakup of the family, lack of success in business, and falling into the sex area, and other reasons.

In *Paradise Lost*, Hisagi and Rinko fall in love with each other, which is a blatant challenge to the moral system of the society by their personal will, but they are not individuals in the society, they have their families and their

own circles, which means that their extramarital affair will inevitably lead to criticisms and criticisms from other people once it is exposed. However, in the book, Hisagi and Rinko still walk leisurely towards the last stop of their lives together, and commit suicide by taking poison in a mountain lodge-style hotel in each other's arms. In a suicide note to "everyone" they write, "Forgive us for our last act of selfishness, and please bury us together." Although the values in the story are not agreeable, it is still shocking to see the beautiful and twisted love of the hero and heroine as they die in a poignant manner.

3. Time Hurdles and Endings

In all three works, the main characters are martyred because of the contradiction between their personal will and the social reality. However, due to the different backgrounds and social environments of the times, the three pairs of main characters face the turbulence of the times, are burdened with the yoke, and end up in different ways.

Romeo and Juliet and Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai are two works in which the protagonists are all privately married and end up martyred due to the obstacles of feudal forces in the feudal era, but there are slight differences in the specific conflicts and contradictions. In the 16th century, Italy and many other countries in Europe were carrying out an ideological and cultural movement, that is, the Renaissance movement. People began to pursue the pleasures of secular life, changed their previous pessimistic attitude towards real life, and rebelled against the extremely hypocritical asceticism of Catholicism. Humanism during this period was both the ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie's anti-feudal struggle and the central idea of bourgeois progressive literature of the period. Using human nature to oppose theocracy, using personality liberation to oppose asceticism, and using reason to oppose obscurantism were its main contents, and Romeo and Juliet was a love tragedy with anti-feudal consciousness produced under this background. There are different opinions about the dynasties in which Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai lived, but it is indisputable that they were both in the feudal society of China, and their every move was confined by

the feudal Confucianism of "three obediences and four virtues" and "three principles and five rules", and their children did not have a say in their choice of marriage, and followed the principle of "parents' rights". In the choice of marriage, the children have no right to speak, following the "parents' order, matchmaker's words", "the door is right for the family", Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai's status gap is doomed to be fruitless.

Unlike the feudal era, where the hero and heroine were martyred for their love, which came from the shackles of feudalism, *Paradise Lost* was created against the background of Japan's bubble economy and economic crisis in the 1990s. Due to the bankruptcy of a large number of companies and the increase in the number of unemployed people, men, who are the main labor force of the family, bring their emotions into their marriages, resulting in the widespread problem of indifference between husband and wife, and the people's inner anxiety and emptiness urgently need People's inner anxiety and emptiness are in desperate need of spiritual comfort. *Paradise Lost* is based on Junichi Watanabe's "Abe Ting Incident", which really happened in 1936. In terms of ideology, under the influence of Shinto, Japanese people were more open to sexuality and pursued worldly indulgence until the 20th century, when Western rationalism was introduced to Japan, which regarded indulgence in sexual relations as an irrational, vulgar, and barbaric behavior, and therefore society and the public had a very low level of tolerance for marital betrayal.

As far as the ending is concerned, the ending of *Romeo and Juliet* is relatively happy. The double death of the two protagonists makes the two families regret the loss of their sons and daughters, and also makes the two families reflect on their hatred for more than a hundred years and coexist peacefully from then on, and their feat may have paved the way for the lovers between the families later on. In "*Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*", even after Liang Shanbo's death, Yingtai did not escape the fate of marrying Ma Wencai, and she could only fight back with her life as the price, but the only good thing is that in the end, they both turned into butterflies, and in a sense, they gained the happiness and romance of the "world after death". *Paradise Lost* is a story that takes place in modern society. The

courage of the protagonist is certainly commendable, and the ending is quite shocking, but in the real society, although the feudalism has been gradually disintegrated, the reason why human beings are human beings is that as individuals who constitute the society, or as children, spouses, or parents, the roles of these individuals qualify each individual as belonging to the society, and they are bound to be subjected to the responsibilities and obligations, Ethics and morality, as well as legal, institutional and ideological rules, govern personal behavior, especially in the sensitive area of male-female relationships. The ending of Hisagi and Rinko is their inner pursuit, but it does not shake the rules of society, which is the fundamental difference between human beings and animals, and this work is more for the readers to wake up and reflect deeply on marriage.

4. Differences between Traditional Chinese and Western Cultures and Philosophies

Digging deeper into the theme of "martyrdom", the attitudes and views of different countries towards it are very different, which is traced back to the differences in concepts and ideas caused by the traditional cultural backgrounds and values of their different countries.

In Western literature, the idea of "life is precious, love is more expensive. If for the sake of freedom, both can be thrown away" concept, in order to die unswervingly love to pay for life instead means to get a new eternal life, get eternal happiness. Westerners prefer to use direct words, warm behavior to express their love for each other, dare to express, not afraid of the occasion, boldly exposed, and social opinion is more tolerant of it. In traditional Chinese culture, there is a negative attitude towards "martyrdom". Confucianism dominates traditional culture, and it is written in the Classic of Filial Piety that "the body, hair and skin are received by parents, and one does not dare to destroy or harm them, and filial piety begins with them", and that bodily harm is an act of unfiliality towards parents and ancestors. Even the cutting of hair is considered a great disrespect, not to mention

the martyrdom for love. The word "love" was also not valued as much as it is in the West, and it had a very low status in ancient China. Traditional marriages were often built on the basis and premise of succession and reproduction, and it was difficult for a woman who did not leave her house to have any romantic love. For sexual behavior is also avoided, as a shame, if the woman or man before marriage to have sex is no match, moral corruption, scorned by the world.

Although the subject of martyrdom appears in literature, the connotation of the meaning of martyrdom is viewed very differently. Martyrdom in Western literature is often praised, lamenting the nobility and greatness of love, as in the previous Romeo and Juliet's ending, although both martyred, but contributed to the eventual reconciliation of the two feuding families, which is progressive and rational thinking; while the East, especially in Chinese literature, although the ending of the martyrdom of the butterfly reunion, but full of mythological colors, and people often use the word "bleak" to describe the ending, which is detached from reality, like a dreamy and fragile. Although the ending of the martyrdom in the East, especially in Chinese literature, is full of mythological colors, people tend to use "bleak and beautiful" to describe the ending, which is detached from the reality, like a dream-like illusion easy to be broken, from a general point of view, the Chinese culture for the martyrdom of the disapproval of the attitude.

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