

Romeo and Juliet: A Story of Love in Hatred

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Abstract: Romeo and Juliet is the most famous play of Shakespeare. The romantic love and the tragic fate of its characters are mainly revealed by conflicts of love and hatred, which have high literary aesthetics and artistic values. Based on the Shakespeare's view of tragic fate, this paper mainly tries to analyze the causes of tragedy from three aspects—family contradiction, personalities of characters and feudal society. Through the full analysis, the paper finds out that various reasons are contributing to the tragic ending such as the two households' resentment and rage, Paris' love to Juliet, Romeo's pursuit for idealistic love, Juliet's insistence on free love, the old and patriarchal society and so on. At last, the conclusion is that at the very start of writing Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare would like to express his indignation to the feudal society and the patriarchal rules by telling the tragic fate of Romeo and Juliet, with which he also criticized the decadent and feudal system at that time.

Keywords: Romeo and Juliet; Love; Shakespeare; Tragedy

1. Introduction

1.1 Literature Review

Romeo and Juliet is one of the most world-famous plays of William Shakespeare. Over the century, there have been many researches on this play. Different scholars have been analyzing the play from different perspectives. From the collected materials, we can see some noble ideas and identical explanations.

Some authors can get a new idea by analyzing the images in plays from the perspective of imagery analysis. Caroline Spurgeon, who is a famous Shakespeare critic and the originator of Imagism, in her article, used the methods of statistics and classification to put forward the significance of repeated images to drama analysis.^[1]

There are a lot of papers analyzing the creation of this play and how Shakespeare adapted it, such as David Farley-Hills: The 'Bad' Quarto of Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare Survey 49, Cambridge,1996.), Jill Levenson: Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: The Places of Invention (Shakespeare Survey 49,Cambridge,1996.), Stanley Wells: The Challenges of Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare Survey 49,Cambridge,1996.) and so on. Compared with a large number of studies abroad, studies in China on Romeo and Juliet started a little bit late. A famous version of translation of it is the 31 Shakespeare's plays translated by Zhu Shenghao.^[2] After that, with the fast development of society and literary works, the complete translation of works of Shakespeare have appeared. It was published by people's education press in 1978, which is indeed a milestone in the translation and research of Shakespeare's plays in China. The research materials the author has searched can be divided into two parts. The first part is about the overall research of Shakespeare's plays, and the second part is about the comparative research between different plays.

The other type of analysis is the comparative research papers between different plays. For example, Wang Xia (22-24) compares the two famous plays Butterfly Lovers and Romeo and Juliet.^[3] She finds out that both plays reflect the influence of the feudal culture of the East and the West on the social women through the stories, which results in the difference of the female images between the East and the West in the construction period.

1.2 The Theoretical Basis

Ethical literary criticism theory put forward by Nie Zhenchuan is to carry out the research on literary works from the

perspective of ethics. The focus is put on the study and analysis of moral and ethical phenomena or problems in literary works (1-5). In other words, it is aimed to study and analyze the moral and ethical problems contained in the contradictions and conflicts of literary works and how those ethical factors cause conflicts. This theory has included the moral-philosophical approach the author applied in the study which emphasizes moralism and utilitarianism and stresses that literature should be delightful and instructive and the purpose of literature is to teach morality (Guerin 77).

At present, there are still no studies which adopt ethical literary criticism theory to analyze “deaths” of Romeo and Juliet.

2.The Family Contradiction

Romeo is the son of Montague and Juliet is the daughter of Capulet. The two families have been enemies for generations and are incompatible. Such a deep family contradiction is bound to be the biggest obstacle to their love. They will fight when they meet in the street, let alone have a love affair between their offspring. Although Romeo and Juliet themselves do not care about family contradictions and deeply love each other, their elders will be the biggest opposition. Two families with deep resentment and feud for generations will not only be difficult to resolve contradictions through the love and combination between future generations, but will feel humiliated and even angry.

On the one hand, the families of both sides often fight because of their feud, symbolizing the decadent and old feudal thought. Self-contradiction and irreconcilability are the foreshadowing of Juliet and Romeo falling in love at first sight at the banquet, but falling in love but not staying together. The opposition between love and hate is the inevitable result of the contradiction between the pursuit of freedom by humanistic ideas and the bondage and imprisonment of feudal ideas. Because Juliet and Romeo are in the original family environment bound by feudal thought, the feud between the two families also symbolizes the competing feudal forces that have been circulating in the middle-ages. But the new generation loves each other. The family feud makes their feelings fall into the net, which has also become the inducement of the tragic feelings of the couple. In the second act of this work, Juliet and Romeo meet on the balcony, showing the lovesickness, oath and love between the lovers, which also indicates that the two sides ignore the feud between the two families and only the surname hinders their feelings. When Juliet said she didn't want to be named Capulet, it reflected Juliet's loyalty to this love and her determination to fight against the family and pursue her own love regardless of Romeo.

Love is more straightforward, and said that as long as you can combine with Juliet, you can abandon your own surname. Their love first developed upward, and reached the peak after the combination, and the family feud began to decline. Act 3 in Verona square, the provocation, battle and death between Romeo's friends and cousin Juliet deepen the hatred and opposition between the two families. A good friend was killed by cousin Juliet. Although the angry Romeo killed cousin Juliet by accident, it became an important motivation for his tragic love with Juliet, which led to the intensification of the feud between the two families. Brad said that family opposition and accidental events lead to the end of tragic love. In the play, Shakespeare naturally expressed deep sympathy for the tragic experience of Romeo and Juliet, the two protagonists who unfortunately became victims under the feudal forces, and hidden in the sad sympathy is a strong complaint against the society that caused the protagonist's tragic fate, a condemnation of the decline of human nature and a silent protest against the gratitude and resentment for many generations. Love has further expanded the family disputes. They have to bear the strong opposition from both families, as well as the anxiety and contradiction of spiritual betrayal of blood. The physical and mental harm has not crushed the sweet lovers, but aroused their fighting spirit. They choose to die to prove that their love is firm and unrepentant. Juliet experienced two deaths in the play. They represent different meanings. For the first time, she was determined to wash away the past "I", get rid of the identity of feudal aristocracy, break away from the old forces, have anti feudalism, and be a new woman of the times with rebellious color; The second time is the "I" affirmation of "rebirth". The meaning of her rebirth is to infinitely enlarge her emotional sustenance, romantic and warm, highlighting human nature and the desire and pursuit of love. She kept her love for Romeo and made this love seem forever through death.

3. Personalities of Characters

3.1 Romeo's Recklessness and Anxiety

Romeo and Juliet are really in love with each other, but there is a fatal contradiction in their personalities, while Romeo and Juliet are not aware of the contradiction of each other's characters, which is the direct cause of the tragedy.

Romeo was born in a big feudal family, but he did not inherit the traditional feudal thought. He firmly pursued personal freedom and romantic love life, and betrayed the feudal family. He was kind, gentle and enthusiastic. Romeo's father once said that Romeo, with a heavy heart, escaped from the light, came home, hid in his room, closed the windows and doors, and closed the sun outside to create an artificial night for himself. It can be seen that Romeo is not calm enough. He does not have the ability to deal with setbacks independently. He can only escape from reality, which leads to his tragic love ending at the character level.

Romeo, the hero, is different from the ordinary noble youth. He is sincere and affectionate, but he always has a rational and indifferent attitude towards the feud of the two feudal families. Romeo's attitude in the face of family hatred is very brave. He doesn't think that he is the tool of family revenge. Before he marries Juliet, Romeo also spent a very distressful time when he knows that Juliet is the child of the enemy family, but finally firmly choose to go forward and back with Juliet. Nevertheless, once again the streets are in chaos, among the mad blood stirring. Romeo, aglow from his marriage ceremony, a vessel of good will, happens by accident upon the aggressive Mercutio and furious Tybalt, his kinsman of an hour. His good will turns out to be the cause of the death of his friend and his own dishonorable submission. In his process of tuning enemies into friends, Romeo is unwilling to give in and tries to resolve the family feud, but he fails and is compelled to exile after the duel.

Although he is in the dilemma of maintaining the family or love, he does not choose to abandon their true feelings. Even if Juliet dies, he still follows his lover. This is Romeo's extreme struggle and strong resistance to feudal family and ethics. This action is also an extreme vent of dissatisfaction with feudal ethics, a challenge to feudal concepts, and a defense of pure love!

3.2 Juliet's Wisdom but Resistance

In contrast to Romeo, Juliet is very intelligent. When she encounters problems and can't solve them by herself, she will actively seek help from others. When Juliet was forced to marry by her father, she went to the priest and got a medicine that could fake death from the priest. Juliet had planned carefully. She thought she could fly away with Romeo after hiding from the world. Juliet refused to listen to her parents' arrangement and chose to fake death to avoid this marriage without emotional foundation when the wedding date was approaching. Juliet's fake death triggered the tragedy of Romeo's suicide by taking poison. When Juliet woke up from the tomb, she found Romeo who had lost her heartbeat beside her. She was full of tears and love, so she stabbed a sharp knife into her chest.

Juliet was born in an aristocratic family. She has rational thinking, naive and lively. Although she is witty and brave, she has a dignified and stable temperament. After the family banquet, the wet nurse told Juliet that the boy dancing with him was the son of the opposite family, but Juliet still calmly faced Romeo, confessed to him and told each other. After the two sides met on the balcony, the huge power of love prompted Juliet to abandon the feudal thought, resolutely move into the palace of marriage and entrust everything to Romeo. After learning that her lover killed her cousin, Juliet's inner contradiction, sadness and anger and anxiety were interpreted in her words. As a cousin connected by blood and a close relative and beloved lover, Juliet's inner conflicts and contradictions make her miserable. These are specific expressions of resentment against the cruel and dark reality, which are accidental events and inevitable wrong arrangements of fate. Juliet is enthusiastic but weak, overestimating the actual gap between reality and ideal. The suppression and attack on the bourgeoisie in the feudal society of Europe. In this family environment, the love between Romeo and Juliet finally leads to the inevitable outcome of tragedy.

If Juliet's cousin's death is the fuse that intensifies the hatred between the two families, the forced marriage of the old Capulet is the final bomb. Instead of eloping with Romeo, she takes a gentle way— the attempt to play dead, in a way that did not infuriate old Capulet, failed. The incompleteness of the revolt leads to a series of uncertain events, including the

failure of the messenger sent by the friar to arrive at the destination in time and the suicide of Romeo and Juliet. It can be seen from the plot that Juliet chooses to take the fake death medicine that, in that special historical period, although the women in Juliet's class status has been influenced by the sprout of early bourgeois humanism thought, due to the long-term pressure of feudal patriarchy, her resistance is still limited which is under the premise of avoiding the positive confrontation with feudal patriarchy as much as possible.

4. Feudal Society

The bondage of feudal thought to man is the fundamental cause of tragedy. In this play, Juliet's father Capulet is the representative of the deep-rooted feudal thought. He liked count Paris as his son-in-law, so he ordered his daughter to marry three days later. No matter how Juliet begged, he refused, regardless of her daughter's feelings, and threatened Juliet with very decisive words. Because he wanted to cling to power, he forced his daughter onto a very risky path. He made the date of his daughter's marriage so urgent that he didn't want to give her any chance to resist. This patriarchy made Juliet feel despair of her father.

In Romeo and Juliet, it is because of the sacrifice of Romeo and Juliet that the two families of Montague and Capulet can eliminate their old feud and reach reconciliation. The real characteristic of tragic conflict is a mysterious factor derived from the concept of purification and Atonement of ancient religion. One of the important means to "clean" or "purify" people's hearts is "sacrifice". Shakespeare regards human tragedy as a sacrifice. "The end of his tragedy is often a sacrifice (Levin 5-7). In the traditional patriarchal society, men and women constitute the binary opposition world of human society. With the disintegration of matriarchal society, patriarchy gradually occupies the top of the rule, and women become the object of oppression, devaluation and exclusion. Society lacks basic respect for female groups, female groups are gradually marginalized, there is not enough space for women, and they even become male vassals. Women have no status to speak of. They restrict themselves according to the requirements of male power, "three obedience and four virtues", and even follow their husband's surname. They are even sold as property and become a tool for men to bear offspring. Their fate is in the hands of others from the beginning. Juliet is a victim of patriarchal oppression. Her father Capulet, after learning that she fell in love with her arch rival Romeo, the son of Montague's family, forced her to marry the noble young Paris in order to break them up, forcing Juliet and Paris to marry quickly. This marriage view of the life of her father and mother led to Juliet's strong resistance, and eventually led to tragedy. Obviously, Capulet takes her daughter Juliet as part of her private property, so she is not given the right to choose love and marriage. Juliet must marry someone he thinks fit according to his requirements. Juliet's happiness and life are almost in his hands.

The sacrifice of tragic heroes can arouse the audience's "fear" and "pity" and purify their emotions. Dramatists often treat the sacrifice ceremony of the protagonist as the climax of the drama, so that the audience can have the emotional experience of life solemnity and death sublimity. This kind of sacrifice has obvious positive significance, which is often accompanied by "life". There is no specific moral intention in the couple's actions. However, the readers have learned and temporarily experienced the redemption of sacrifice. In drama creation, conflict is often the fundamental driving force to promote the development of plot, that is to say, the drama develops in the process of conflict and its resolution. The conflicts in this play are mainly embodied in the family feud, between individuals and society, and between feudalism and humanism.

The social background of Romeo and Juliet is the stage of the disintegration of feudal society and the development of capitalism in feudal society. It is the stage in which many European countries are facing the impact and exaggeration of the ideological and cultural movement of gradual development. Under this social environment, the revolutionary movements at the ideological and cultural levels in European countries have touched many fields, and the ancient Roman and ancient Greek cultures have been rediscovered and valued under this background. From the 14th century to the 15th century, due to the rapid development of urban commodity economy and handicraft industry, capitalism gradually formed within the feudal system of European society. In order to clarify its own requirements and interests, the new bourgeoisie took the revival of ancient Roman and Greek culture as the starting point, put forward humanitarianism, and required to respect human needs, essence, interests and many possibilities of development and creation.

5. Conclusion

Juliet and Romeo died for love and wrote a moving and praiseworthy love story for mankind. The intensification of many plot contradictions and conflicts is the inevitability that leads this relationship to a tragic outcome. The tragedies of Romeo and Juliet also criticize the backward and decadent thought of European feudal society, showing the contradiction and struggle between the bourgeoisie and the traditional feudal class. Appreciating love above life is the most noble emotion of mankind. The multiplicity of characters and background leads to the diversity of the meaning of tragic love.

The love story in the tragedy Romeo and Juliet is moving, lamentable and shocking. The love between Romeo and Juliet has its inevitability to become a tragedy. The reasons leading to inevitability are diverse and very complex. Under the siege of family contradiction, personality contradiction and feudal thought. If love is unwilling to compromise, it can only choose destruction. After the destruction of love, what is left to the world is eternal memory.

Romeo and Juliet, as a work with strong humanistic spirit, reflects the confrontation between feudal power and new bourgeois humanism in the late Middle Ages. Romeo and Juliet, as the representatives of the bourgeoisie in the pursuit of free love, show the bright prospect of personal emancipation, in sharp conflict with the decadent feudal patriarchal ideology. Romeo and Juliet tried to break through the family shackles of hatred but finally failed to change the fate and ended up in death. Through this paper, the author analyzed several causes of the tragic fate in Romeo and Juliet such as the two households' resentment and rage, Paris' love to Juliet, Romeo's pursuit for idealistic love, Juliet's insistence on free love, and the old and patriarchal society. Then based on the analysis of Shakespeare's view of tragic fate, the author found that at the beginning of writing Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare would like to express his indignation to the feudal society and the patriarchal rules by the tragic fate of Romeo and Juliet. Overall, this kind of tragic fate criticized the decadent and feudal system at that time. This work of play also has very high artistic esthetic, which could explain why it has got so much population worldwide. Romeo and Juliet has already become the classic images in the world literature. The persistent pursuit of free love and the rebellion against the stubborn feudal society have also become the model for today's young men and women to pursue free love and strive for freedom.

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