

A Brief Introduction to Bob Dylan's the Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

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Abstract: In 1964, Bob Dylan published a narrative poem called *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, which has been collected in Bob Dylan's album *The Times They are a Changin'*. It narrated a murder case that a young white man killed an aged black bar maid cruelly in a bar and received a light sentence. Once released, the album attracted the attention of all walks of life. At a time when racial segregation was still on its day, the poet used a sharp tone to attack the remnants of post-colonialism. This poem is of great reference value to the study of minority identity in the United States, the study of civil rights movement in the United States, and the formulation of ethnic policies around the world.

Keywords: Bob Dylan; Racial conflict; Social justice

Introduction

The story is based on a real event that took place at one o'clock in the morning on February 9, 1963. Hattie Carroll was a barmaid at a Baltimore restaurant, at that day a man named William Zansinger arrived in the hotel's ballroom with his wife and a toy cane in hand. William Zansinger (William Zanzinger in the poem), who was drunk at the time, attacked three hotel employees, including Hattie Carroll. William had ordered a bourbon, he thought Hattie Carroll was slow to serve it and was black, so he began to scold her. Eight hours later, Hattie succumbed to her injuries and died. William Zansinger was sentenced to six months in jail and fined 125 dollars.

1. Poem Appreciation

1.1 Writing Style

The poet used weak rhyme at the end of each narrative section, for example, he used words Zanzinger and Carroll at the end of the last two syllables. The whole poem is based on weak rhyme, which sounds like the poet is telling the story in a smooth and pleasant way. At the same time, such unstressed syllables can give people a feeling of brave and desperate struggle. It is like a flag waving in the wind, which is sonorous and powerful to encourage people to struggle forward.

1.2 Murder Most Foul

This case greatly shook the American society at that time. All sides condemned the verdict. Dylan, who is on tour in Washington, wrote *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll* to protest after learning of the trial. The straightforward and bold title of the poem greatly attracts the reader's attention. William Zanzinger, the main character, makes a striking appearance at the beginning of the first stanza. The poem begins with William Zanzinger beating poor Hattie Carroll to death with a cane. The poet explained the whole course and result of the case in four simple lines. It gives reader a sense that the whole thing is being brushed aside and that power is not equal between the black and white races. What catches readers' attention here is that the cane in the poem is not a sharp weapon, but a universally accepted symbol of civilized society. It shows the cruelty of beating a person to death with such a civilized symbol with almost no aggression. In the third line, the poet uses the word "Society Gathering" to explain the place where the crime happened, which implies that Hattie Carroll died alone under the eyes of the public. There is a sharp contrast between the two, which not only gives readers a strong sense of impact, but also makes the whole poem conciser and smoother in words.

1.3 Philosophize and Criticize

Philosophize and criticize are used in the second stanza. Philosophize, meaning serious discussion, eloquence, and Philosophize, is applied to disgrace and criticize fear, so strongly suggestive of Dylan's profound language that it is hard for readers to understand.

In a 1964 interview in London, Dylan was asked if he thought people could understand what you were trying to say. Without thinking, Dylan replied, "I think young people can understand everything I've written." The year 1963 was an extraordinary year in the history of the United States. In April of that year, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. led a demonstration in Birmingham, the United States civil rights movement officially began. On August 28 of that year (the day of Zansinger's trial) King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial. On November 1, the United States assassinated South Vietnamese leader Diem Diem, and Kennedy was assassinated 21 days later. It was the Beat generation, and the upswing of society led young people to pursue spiritual freedom and sexual liberation, attach importance to the protection of black rights, and oppose age discrimination. They opposed the strict censorship of literary works, such as *Lolita*. On the other hand, they craved pursuit of rock music, alcohol abuse and drugs. Even at the cost of committing a crime to express their opposition to mainstream culture.

"Philosophize Disgrace" and "Criticize Fears" are a complex epitome of *The Times*. The society at that time was full of fear and ugliness for minorities like black people. This kind of fear and ugliness was a normal thing that young people had to face at that time. Just like Heidi, they also had to face a society with a dim future. They did not know when they would be thrown into the mire of the Vietnam War and die like Bubba in *Forrest Gump*. A young man's fate is not yet in his own hands, let alone that of a middle-aged woman over fifty. If people let ugliness prevail, they will be in danger. Because of this, in this society where no one can protect themselves, we need a group of courageous people to "throw away the handkerchief that wipes tears" and bravely stand up to "philosophize disgrace and criticize fear". The appealing rhyme coupled with its combative meaning, made the poem particularly combative in the 1960s, when the civil rights movement was booming.

A Strayed Casanova

The second part of the poem tells the story of William Zansinger, a wealthy young man who owned six hundred acres of tobacco. His parents were wealthy and had powerful connections in the Maryland state government. Therefore, a great event of life and death, in front of them, is nothing more than the poet described the reaction of the shoulder.

Formed a strong contrast between the perpetrators and victims, that evening, his behavior belongs to alcoholism, alcohol greatly inspired his beast, and made the extremely crazy behavior, under the catalysis of alcohol, is embedded with a mighty superiority of the killer, do the backlog of madness in his mind, that night, He not only expressed his discrimination against the black people with words, but also took away a priceless life with a worthless ledger. The outbreak of evil thoughts caused by racial discrimination took away a strong and great mother in an instant, and also took away all the lives of ten innocent teenagers.

Conclusion

Hattie Carroll is one of few female black people's images in Bob Dylan's writings. Although this image is not more complete than the black people's images among writers, it has the following characteristics: Firstly, the text processing is simple and concise. Carroll's appearances are few but each one holds the reader's attention, as well as the author's tendency to overplay it. Secondly, although the image is not the center of the poem, it is the center of narration. The poet sets off Hattie's misfortune through a long description of Zanzinger. Through the description of the black group represented by Hattie, it reflects the long-standing racial problem that has troubled the American society, and makes a powerful attack on the American judicial system under the white discourse system. Thirdly, with black people's image in the narrative process of the whole poem, the poem has a very explosive beginning, it strongly pull Hattie Carroll and Zanzinger's image so contracted to readers.

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