

The Disappeared Characters

Discussion on the Absence of Clowns in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms"

Ru Luo

The College of Literature and Journalism
Sichuan University
Chengdu, China

Abstract—Director Bu Wancang adapted a new drama "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" on the basis of Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona". The former borrowed the plot of the latter, but made a bold localization adaptation. This paper attempts to analyze the reason why Bu Wancang removes the clown in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" from three aspects of the cognition of clown from the traditional Chinese drama, the film and the director's own background and the audience's acceptance. It is believed that it is precisely because the clown is in a low position in traditional drama, the director accepts the traditional Chinese education and the "civic essence" of most of the audience at that time, which led to the disappearance of the clown in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms".

Keywords—"The Two Gentlemen of Verona"; "A Spray of Plum Blossoms"; localization adaptation; clown

I. INTRODUCTION

"A Spray of Plum Blossoms" is a love film directed by Bu Wancang, and performed by Jin Yan, Lin Chuchu, Wang Cilong, and Yan Lingyu, etc. The film was produced by Lianhua Company and was released in Shanghai on July 23, 1931. It was a hit after it was released.

The film is mainly adapted from Shakespeare's comedy "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", which was created at the end of the 16th century. The latter mainly tells about Verona's youth, Van Lentin, who went to Milan to find a fortune, and fell in love with the Duke's daughter Silvia in Milan. The duke refused, the two decided to run away. And the friend of the Van Lentin, Proudus, originally had a lover Julia in Verona. After he arrived in Milan, he abandoned his lover in Verona and turned to Silvia for courtship. After being rejected, he revealed to Silvia's father that Van Lentin and Silvia's elopement plan. Van Lentin was forced to flee and became the leader of the robber. Julia came to Milan to follow her love, dressed up as a man, became the servant of Proudus, and was sent by Proudus to express his love to Silvia. Julia fainted, and Silvia was forced to marry Shurio after being forced by her father, fled into the forest, but was robbed by the robbers. Van Lentin, who was already the leader of the robbers, immediately rescued Silvia. The Duke agreed to the marriage of Valentin and Silvia. Van Lentin loudly rebuked Proudus, and the shameful Proudus recognized the male, Julia, who dressed up as a man, thinks that she is her true love, so the two lovers live happily together. The "A Spray of Plum Blossoms", which was

adapted on this basis, almost tells the same story — the love story between Hu Lunting and Shi Luohua, and Bai Lede and Hu Zhuli. Bai Lede and Hu Lunting, who graduated from the military academy, were good friends. After graduation, Hu Lunting went to Guangzhou, Bai Lede stayed in Shanghai. Bai Lede fell in love with Hu Lunting's sister Hu Zhuli, and Hu Lunting, who was far away in Guangzhou, admired each other with the local supervising niece Shi Luohua. Not long after, Bai Lede also transferred to Guangzhou, and fell in love with Shi Luohua, telling rumors in the supervision led to Hu Lunting being ousted, Hu Lunting became a rogue leader, Hu Zhuli female disguised as a man to stay at the side of Shi Luohua, and Shi Luohua was saved by rogue and met Hu Lunting. Bai Lede, who wanted to capture Hu Lunting, regained his conscience after meeting. He proactively admitted his mistakes. The two pairs of lovers got married, Hu Lunting's position was restored, and life was back on track.

After comparing the "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" dramas, it is not difficult to find that "the two use the expression 'love' as the driving force for the development of the plot, and through parody, "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" is reflecting the Chinese ethical and moral orientation in the story of 'love' which has evolved the 'satire' and 'teaching'." [1] After giving the Chinese-style moral teaching function of "A Spray of Plum Blossoms", the director Bu Wancang and the screenwriter Huang XX made a series of adjustments to the plot. It is more obvious that the witty clown character in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" is disappeared in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms".

II. CLOWNS IN WESTERN DRAMA

Clown's initial meaning is earth, and clowns are related to soil and peasants; around 1550, "coarse people" (i.e. clowns) entered the British moral drama; and by around 1580, the clowns appeared in the British court show and became court clowns, such as Tarlton, the famous clown actor of that era. In this context, Shakespeare likes to design several clowns in his works, such as the "touchstone" in "As You Like It", "Fest" in "Twelfth Night", the fool man in "The King Lear", and Peter in "Romeo and Juliet", etc. These clowns have different functions. "Shakespeare's clowns can be generally divided into three types. The first type is the court clown and the fool man... This kind of clown is smarter,

has a sense of humor, can swear by the choice of the right time to make jokes, and is good at playing with words. The second type of clowns is servants who appear in the drama in various ways according to the plot... They are good at imitating the behavior of the masters to achieve the Purpose of humor. The third type is the fools who appear in the drama in other roles... They are the laughing stock of people and can express the atmosphere of comedy" [2].

There are also two such characters in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", the stupid servant of Stude Van Rentin" [3], and "the silly servant of Lance Dess" [3]. They shoulder the function of "the court clown and the fool man". In the "A Spray of Plum Blossoms", it was surprised to find that there is no special clown, and the other roles share the role of clown. Why did the director make such a choice? What is the reason behind it?

The traditional concept of "clown", director personal experience and audience expectations are the main reasons for the disappearance of the clowns in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms".

III. THE POSITION OF THE CLOWN IN CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURE

In the more than two thousand years of the development of Chinese opera, the clown is an indispensable role. Before it was formally formed, it experienced the stages of the Pai actors of Qin Dynasty, the canjun (a political staff) of Tang Dynasty, the fujiang of Song and Jin Dynasties, and till Yuan and Ming Dynasties, the clown formally formed, divided into sitton and millitary clown, which can be subdivided into several categories.

When it comes to the role of the clown, it has to mention the Southern Song Dynasty "Zhang Xie Number One Scholar". Since its position as a harlequin was basically established, that is, the supporting role — as the protagonist of the foil appeared in the drama, its status was not high, and the originator of the clown — the political status of Pai actors was very low. In this country that attaches great importance to the ethics of the school, the status of the Pai actors was low, and then the clown's status on the basis of it was inevitably not high. Wang Guowei once said that "the role of modern world drama has a meaning of classification, although it is not its Purpose, but the meaning of the latter is as it is, and it cannot be embarrassed. The final meaning of the character is actually here. The words and deeds of the people, and then the temperament, can be seen in the list of appearances and voices." [4] When the film landed in China, it was called a film opera, and the connection between film and drama was evident. Since the position of the clown in the drama was not high, its status in the film will be too high. Therefore, Bu Wancang, who was deeply baptized by the old times, also gave up such a role setting when he adapted the drama.

IV. THE PERSONAL CHOICE OF THE DIRECTOR BU WANCANG

Bu Wancang was born on August 23, 1903 in Bujiaying, Yuxing Township, Tianchang County, Anhui Province. He studied in Jiangsu Fifth Normal School (Yangzhou today). The ancestors were the landlords, and the family was in straitened circumstances. It was already relatively poor in his generation. He later went to modern Shanghai to work in film.

His growth was in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society with a complex background. On the one hand, Western culture has been increasingly introduced into China, and China has been forced to accelerate the process of modernity. In large cities such as Shanghai, neon lights, large-scale production of machinery, and high-rise buildings had gradually entered people's lives, and the accompanying ideas of liberal democracy had become increasingly popular. On the other hand, in the inland cities and the vast rural areas, feudal ideas still dominated people's lives, and old-style lifestyles and traditional ethical cultures still deeply influenced people. This half-half character was also evident in Bu Wancang's body. He was fascinated by traditional drama and was keen on new cars. Gu Yelu once commented on him. "In the ideology of Bu Wancang, the feudal morality was deep..." [5] Bu Wancang accepted the Chinese Confucian traditional education from an early age, and the May Fourth New Culture Movement did not enlighten him. So he was literati with traditional old Confucian temperament. He respected traditional ethics and accepted traditional literary ideas. In the Star Company, his works always carried the shadow of traditional ethics and morality, and praised the traditional family ethics; in the period when he was in Lianhua Company, it seemed that modernity had a deeper influence on him, he accepted free love, "A Spray of Plum Blossoms", Bai Lede and Hu Zhuli were free love. They are no longer the traditional marriage at "the words of a match-maker". Shi Luohua even resisted the father's interference in her marriage. In the end, the lovers finally stepped into marriage and married Hu Lunting. However, the moral teaching of the play is still heavy: Bai Lede took the army to arrest Hu Lunting, who had become the leader of the robbers, and was educated by Hu Lunting. In the end, because of moral sensibility, Bai Lede reflected on himself, and Hu Lunting also went down to the right path. Because of Hu Lunting's words "General powder, do you still know her", Bai Lede immediately felt ashamed and tried to commit suicide, and Hu prevented him from committing suicide. "Lede, when I conspired to betray, my life was spared by you, so I don't want your life now either!" Then, Hu Lunting patted Bai Lede's shoulder and said, "I hope you understand that I am always your most loyal friend." Bai was influenced, and admitted to the Shi Supervision that he was slandering Hu Lunting. It can be seen from this that Bu Wancang still hoped to use the power of ethics and morality to influence people. So how deeply imprinted the traditional culture is on him.

Bu Wancang did not hesitate to remove the clown character in the original drama "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms", it is believed that

he was also deeply influenced by the traditional literature view. As mentioned above, in traditional Chinese drama, the clown is not valued. It exists as a supporting role. Its role is to set off the beauty, or to increase the laughter of the drama. However, in the drama of "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", it is not to set off the beauty, the two clowns are sometimes meant to make the drama interesting, sometimes for the sake of lucidity. This has certain differences from Chinese traditional clown effect; even if it is for the laughter, because of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, the audience may not understand. So Bu Wancang decisively gave up the clowns in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms". The role of the clowns in the original drama was taken over by other characters. In the 50 minutes of the film, Bai Lede made a trick to make Shi Luohua happy, and made the same trick as he once had Hu Zhuli — he made the shape of the animal by hand, plus the interesting language, teasing Shi Luohua laughing, which increased the fun of the film; for example, by Hu Lunting's words, "women are more harmful than swords and guns. When we become a major event, we must never break this ring." This is in line with the feudal society's "dangerous beauty".

V. AUDIENCE

In the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai's society was developed. With the development of capitalism, its corresponding commercialization and popularization ideas continued to develop, which promoted the development of movies. Culture is no longer exclusive to the elite. It is an aesthetic activity for the public to relax. As a result, the scope of the film audience had gradually widened. There were both foreigners and locals. There were both "superior people" and small citizens. Their backgrounds were different, but most of them came for entertainment. According to the "Undergraduates and Movie" Published in "The Movie" magazine in 1930, some people had conducted a survey of their classmates going to the cinema, a total of 86 people, of which 16 people went for the entertainment, and this was even to the number of people who went for the appreciation of literature. The rest were aimed at historical taste, excitement, music appreciation, listening to songs and watching the dance, seeking wisdom, learning English and so on. Although this was just a survey of this person with his classmates, and there were not many people, it can also reflect the main purpose of people to go to the cinema.

Since most of the audience was looking for fun, and the clown in the "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" drama was to increase the comedy of the play, from the perspective of acceptance theory, the viewers are expecting such a character to appear in the play. Why the director still wants to delete this role?

Bu Wancang is considered to be "in the artistic creation, he had the characteristics of conforming to the mainstream ideology and the aesthetic characteristics of the public" [6], so he would not ignore the public's aesthetic taste.

Before discussing "A Spray of Plum Blossoms", it is necessary to first discuss that the setting of the clown in Shakespeare is for whom to see it. "Shakespeare's audience...

Most of them are drama lovers, paying a penny or higher fare — it is a considerable expenditure for London handicraft workers who earn 12 pence a day — and then come to enjoy the stage performance. It can be concluded that they pay more attention to the stage performance, the development of the plot and the humorous language of the actors." [7] It is not difficult to see that the audience at that time focused on the humorous performance of the actors, just as the characters appeared in the play, in line with their expectations. The audience group to be faced by "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" was different. "After the 1930s, small and medium-sized businessmen and ordinary citizens grew up, forming a mass group of cities, shopping malls, theaters, cinemas, and even various art forms were changed for it" [8]. The growth of the small citizen class had become the mainstream of the movie, then Bu Wancang had to take care of their aesthetic taste — secularized color and utilitarian tendency. Their main concerns were the gossip of the others, and what they want to see was the conflict of good and evil and traditional ethics that covered the surface of daily life. The appearance of the court clown was neither in line with their aesthetics nor in the social background of gradual modernization. Therefore, Bu Wancang removed such a role in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" and used the remaining characters to create a relaxed tone that met the audience's expectations.

Bu Wancang started from the local culture, combined with his own background, fully considered the acceptance of the audience, and adapted the "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", which did not affect the box office of "A Spray of Plum Blossoms", and even contributed to the success of the box office. On July 23, 1931, after almost one year of preparation, "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" was finally released. Lianhua Company had a 7-day advertisement on the "Shun Pao" before and after the release. The show was released at the Shanghai Guanghua Grand Theater for 10 days, and the field was full and the movie was in heat. This can explain that such localization adaptation has been extremely successful in business, once again proving that the early commercial film model — the Hollywood model combined with traditional ethics in the early 1930s would work.

Through the above analysis, it is not difficult to see that it is the traditional Chinese culture's view of the clown — which has always felt that it is unorthodox and should not occupy a certain position in the movie theater; the director of the traditional culture, Bu Wancang, viewed the clown the same; from the expectations of the audience, they expect to see something different from the movie, and the clown is a common role in traditional drama, which is not enough to attract them. In addition, due to cultural differences, the Chinese audience's acceptance of the court clown is not high. Therefore, when the director Bu Wancang adapted the drama, he gave up the setting of the clown in the original drama and distributed the role he assumed to other characters, so as not to weaken the effect of the film.

VI. CONCLUSION

Actually, the absence of the clowns in "A Spray of Plum Blossoms" doesn't cause any trouble for the audience to understand it. In order to be more localized, director Bu Wancang made other characters undertake clown's role.

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