

Analysis of the Postmodernist Elements in “The Palace of Eternal Life”

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese classical opera "The Palace of Eternal Life" is famous all over the world for its vivid and vivid characters and poignant love stories. There are also many studies on it. The purpose of this paper is to find out the parts of "The Palace of Eternal Life" that are confirmed by postmodernism through a close reading of the entire text of "The Palace of Eternal Life", combined with the existing related works and literature, from the aspects of deconstruction of authority, dream interpretation, and multiple narratives. Partly unfolds to explore the avant-garde and modernity contained in the classical opera "The Palace of Longevity".

Keywords: *The Palace of Eternal Life, the Postmodernist Elements, Deconstruction of Authority, Dream Interpretation, Multiple Narratives*

1. INTRODUCTION

“The Palace of Eternal Life” is a classical Chinese drama, and the love story of Li Longji and Yang Yuhuan has been widely circulated in later generations, and the An-Shi Rebellion, which resulted from the "occupying the love field and relaxation of the dynasty", has also been saddened. After reading a lot of related literature, I found that most scholars focus on the image of Yang Yuhuan and Li Longji, the narrative techniques and characteristics of The Palace of Eternal Life, and the historical transmission and dissemination of “The Palace of Eternal Life”, while no scholars have explored the use of postmodernism to analyze the classical opera “The Palace of Eternal Life”. Therefore, after reading the text of “The Palace of Eternal Life”, I will discover the pioneering nature of the text, so as to discover the parts that are corroborated with postmodernism. This paper focuses on the deconstruction of authority, dream interpretation, and multiple narratives, exploring the characters of Yang Yuhuan, Li Longji, and An Lushan, as well as important episodes such as "Hearing Music" and "Rain Dream".

2. DECONSTRUCTING AUTHORITY

The interpretation of the text of “The Palace of Eternal Life” cannot be separated from the analysis of the Emperor Li longji, also known as Tang Minghuang, Tang Xuanzong. As the emperor, Li Longji is the hero of “The

Palace of Eternal Life”, and the absolute power that comes with his special status may seem unquestionable. however, in reality, his power was dispersed and broken down both before and after the Maweiya Mutiny.

The first is Li Longji's power over women, which is mainly reflected in the part before the Maweiya mutiny. At the beginning, the power over women is an absolute power, which is reflected in the favoring of Yang Yuhuan, who is also known as Yang Guifei, and in the second part of "Love-promise", Yang Yuhuan is rewarded with grace, and the expression "in a flash the body is judged to be on earth and in heaven"[1] is an accurate and subtle expression of the Emperor Tang Minghuang's favoring of Yang Yuhuan, which is also a reflection of the absolute power. And later in the spring tour episode, this imperial authority is also still carried out in favor of her sister Lady Guoguo, Yang Guifei was sent back to the prime minister's house for jealousy. Next, Yang Yuhuan is the first to give in, sending her broken hair back to the palace to the Emperor Tang Minghuang by Gao Lishi to show her remorse, and then they made up. In the fifteenth, sixteenth part, Yang Guifei likes to eat lychee and the birth anniversary will come, the emperor overcame difficulties to let people transport lychee to the palace. Even if the road stations and postmen are deeply affected by this action, the people and crops also suffer as a result. It can be said that the power of the country only for the beauty of a smile, this arbitrary behavior regardless of cost is also the embodiment of the absolute power of the

Emperor Tang Minghuang. But the Emperor Tang Minghuang for similar things happened after a huge change in the way of handling, in a private meeting with Mei Fei, almost Yang Guifei "caught adultery", Mei Fei is the emperor's legal concubine in the status, and there is no "adultery", but both from actions of Yang Guifei and Tang Ming Huang can be found that this was indeed defined as an act of "cheating", so that Concubine Mei had to "hide for a while in the curtain"[2]. The power of the Emperor Tang Minghuang over women actually changed from promiscuity to devotion after the "betrayal", repatriation, re-call, music making and dancing with Yang Guifei, thus giving up the power of the Emperor to have three wives and four concubines to the power of only Yang Guifei, not only out of favor to Yang Yuhuan, but also as a deconstruction of the imperial power. This is not only out of favor to Yang Yuhuan, but also a deconstruction of imperial power.

Secondly, in terms of dynastic politics, Li Longji's power was also in a state of dissipation. The power of the Emperor Tang Minghuang was held by Yang Guozhong, who was the brother of Yang Yuhuan, in the appointment and dismissal of officials and in the management of important matters in the court, and this dissipation of power was especially prominent in the case of An Lushan. In the first half of the play, Yang Guozhong's position was always under one person and above all others. In the poem when he appeared "The state government is in my hands, and the three platforms and eight seats are highly respected.....share the light of the sun and the moon, palm the command of the wind and thunder, extravagance, carpe diem, the power to bribe is powerful" [3]. It is easy to find that he is the one who really holds the government, has the actual power, and receives numerous bribes. This is why in the third play "Bribing Power", An Lushan, who originally "lost his chance at the battlefield and was sentenced to death in Capital", was able to get off because he bribed Yang Yuhuan's brother Yang Guozhong, which shows that the actual decision of An Lushan's life and death was not only in the hands of the emperor, but in Yang Guozhong's mind, and even in the fifth play An Lushan was promoted. And at the local level, because of his disagreement with Yang Guozhong, An Lushan was appointed as Fanyang's envoy and was ready to put his retained ambitions into action. An Lushan went out of the capital to be the Fanyang's envoy and took control of the local power. At the same time, the Emperor Tang Minghuang lost control over An Lushan and his control over the local area was weakened, which also laid the groundwork for the subsequent rebellion of An Lushan. From the result, An Lushan's rebellion was a great threat and challenge to the imperial power and another manifestation of the deconstruction of the imperial power.

The Maweiyi mutiny was a typical event of power deconstruction, and the decisions made by Emperor Tang Minghuang in this crucial event were not made out of his

own heart. He wanted An Lushan to be loyal to his country, but An Lushan rebelled and even invaded the capital; he wanted the soldiers to escort him, but the soldiers led by Chen Yuanli, refused to do so unless he killed the Yang family to set the record straight; he wanted to protect Yang Guifei, but the soldiers could not be persuaded to escort him without killing Yang Guifei. When the mutiny could not protect his beloved concubine and her family, he was forced by the generals to make the decision to abandon the car to protect the marshal, which is ultimately "The son of Heaven is very noble, but not more than Mochou". The choice itself is part of the power, and the loss of the choice reflects the dissolution of the Emperor Tang Minghuang's power. Later, in the thirty-first episode of "The Suppression of the Invaders", Guo Ziyi's words, "The emperor is on his way to Xichuan, and now he is on the throne of Lingwu", reflecting the fact that the emperor Tang Minghuang has given way to Tang Suzong, and thus the power of the emperor has been transferred from Li Longji to his son Tang Suzong. After pacifying the rebellion, Li Longji returned to the palace and retired to the south. Although he was the supreme emperor, his life situation after giving up power was different from that of the emperor. In "Rain Dreams", Li Longji misses Yang Yuhuan so much that even his dreams reflect his dissatisfaction with the current stage of life. In the dream, Chen Yuanli continues to block Li Longji's travels, threatening him, "If you do not return to the palace, I am afraid that the six armies will change again..... deceiving me for not having the authority to stay idle and retire from the court, and only trying to show off your prestige and pride of soldiers" [4]. It can be seen that after the An-Shi Rebellion, although Emperor Tang Xuanzong had become the supreme emperor, his power had dissipated and passed into the hands of others.

Emperor Tang Xuanzong is supposed to be the most authoritative person in the play, but the author's portrayal of this character with absolute power shows that authority is deconstructed little by little, and the imperial power as the traditional order is dissolved step by step, which is a process of demystification. As Foucault explains in "Society must be defended", "Power never determines its place.....Power operates." [5] The imperial power of Emperor Tang Xuanzong was not definite and unchanging, but operational. This presentation and dissolution of power is the color of postmodernism embodied in "The Palace of Eternal Life".

3. DREAM INTERPRETATION

In "The Palace of Eternal Life", Hong Sheng tries to construct two worlds, one is the real world and the other is the world beyond the reality. The real world is the world where Li Longji and Yang Yuhuan live together, a world constructed based on historical facts. The transcendental world refers to the moon palace Yang Yuhuan saw in her dreams, the environment in which her

soul wandered after her death, the netherworld where her brother Yang Guozhong and her sister lady Guoguo were taken away by the bull-headed ghosts, or her ascension into the fairyland of Penglai after her corpse was disintegrated, all of which are unreal and transcendental worlds constructed out of reality. According to Kulitsyn, a contemporary Russian literary critic, postmodernism, which became popular in the late 20th century, can be understood as a re-emerging primitive culture. He says that "the 'old' primitive culture arose with the emergence of material forms that could directly reflect themselves, that is, with the emergence of man. The 'new' primitive culture arose when culture began to reflect itself.....Culture itself is returning to itself." [6] And dreams play a role in the entire play in linking the two worlds as well as in driving the main characters from the real world into the transcendental world as a plot development, mainly in "Hearing Music" which focuses on the dream of Yang Yuhuan and "Rain Dreams" which focuses on the dream of Tang Minghuang.

In the play "Hearing Music", Yang Guifei enters the Moon Palace through a dream and is guided by the Fairy of the Cold Spring sent by Chang'e to bring the immortal music "Melody of White Feathers Garment" from heaven to earth. Because Yang Yuhuan was known as Penglai Yufei formerly and had been to the Moon Palace when she was an immortal, and Chang'e thought it would be a good story to transmit the immortal music to the mortal world, she made the fairy enter Yang Yuhuan's dream and let Yang Yuhuan enter another world through the carrier of dreams. At this time, Yang Yuhuan's dream is not a reflection and projection of the real society, but serves as a medium to communicate between the surreal world and the real world, allowing the soul of Yang Yuhuan, who is still alive in the human world, to leave her physical body and enter the immortal world. In the Moon Palace, Yang Yuhuan learns the song "Melody of White Feathers Garment". As a result, lays the foundation for her later favor. This is the first time the play introduces another world that is not the real world. The author used the dream world as a vehicle to enter the other world, gave it a role, and invoked the setting of the soul leaving the physical body to strengthen the role of the dream world in connecting the real world with the world beyond the real world.

In the play of "Rain Dream", Li Longji experienced the Maweiyi mutiny after leaving the palace, where the powerful minister and his beloved concubine were successively forced to death by the mutineers, and in the process of pacifying An Lushan's rebellion, he was deprived of his power by handing over his power to his son and becoming the supreme emperor. According to common sense, the supreme emperor was supposed to be the supreme ruler of power and enjoyed the supreme right to decide on all matters. From the time he returned to the capital from Shu, everything he saw and heard was different, and he had already lost the majesty and power

of the most supreme ruler. On his way back, he once again passed by Maweiyi and proposed to rebury Yang Yuhuan. It is clear that Li Longji's love for Yang Yuhuan was strong and devoted. This infatuation was also shown on his way to Shu, when he cried to the portrait of Yang Yuhuan and reminisced about the time when they were in love. When he decided to rebury Yang Yuhuan, he opened the coffin and found that there was no corpse inside. After hearing others say that perhaps there was a corpse disintegration, he gradually got the idea that Yang Yuhuan was still alive or her soul was still in this world, thus deepening his longing for Yang Yuhuan and looking forward to seeing her again. Therefore, in this episode of "Rain Dream", the author describes Li Longji's dream, vividly portraying that Li Longji met two chamberlains in his dream and asked him to meet Yang Yuhuan at Maweiyi. Because of the eagerness to miss Yang Yuhuan, he immediately wanted to go there, but he was stopped by Chen Yuanli, who even threatened to mutiny again. This dream connection is not a connection between the real world and the surreal world, it focuses on the real thoughts of Li Longji's heart, or the projection of his real life in the dream world. This dream is a projection of his dissatisfaction with the real situation, and it also leads to the key event of finding the Taoist priest of Linqiong to help him find Yang Yuhuan. It can be said that Li Longji's dream plays an important role in promoting the connection between the real world and the transcendental reality.

Combining the dreams of Li Longji and Yang Yuhuan, whether Yang Yuhuan enters a fairyland beyond reality in her sleep or the dream of Emperor Tang Minghuang, who missed Yang Yuhuan too much, are the portrayal of a non-realistic scene, which itself is the construction of an irrational field, and this irrationality is precisely the embodiment of absurdity. In the dream of Emperor Tang Minghuang, there appeared the chamberlain who invited to Maweiyi, Chen Yuanli who blocked the exit from the palace, and dreamed that suddenly changed from the deserted suburbs to the river, saw the pig cage, the god of golden armor, etc. These seemingly connected but independent people or objects appear in the dream of Tang Minghuang in less than one shift, especially the rapid change of scenes, the appearance of people, objects and scenery, showing the characteristics of the fragmentation of the dream, but also reflects the absurdity and irrationality of the dream. The absurdity and fragmentation of dreams are the embodiment of postmodernism.

4. MULTIPLE NARRATIVES

In his essay "The Postmodern State", Liotta declares his opposition to monistic thinking and rebellion against rationality. In his essay "Walking Between Modern and Postmodern", Song Yan interprets this notion of Liotta as this deconstruction of the original meta-narrative,

monism provides a powerful environment and context for marginal cultural narratives, and both the growth narrative and the bottom narrative are narrative methods that oppose monism and deconstruct it under monism. The multiple narratives in "The Palace of Eternal Life" are mainly reflected in the diversity of narratives, and the author mainly discusses them in two parts: the growth narrative and the bottom narrative.

4.1. Growth Narrative

Among the many characters portrayed by Hong Sheng, the theme of growth embodied in the protagonist Yang Yuhuan is undoubtedly the most remarkable. The changes that occur in her are not only her attitude toward love, but also her reflection on the meaning of life and her past. In portraying this character, Hong Sheng does not use the theme-first writing technique, but allows the character to experience different events and grow gradually through the experience in a smooth and natural way according to her own character.

In the beginning of the play, Yang Yuhuan is characterized as capricious, domineering and jealous. She is very much loved and that brings glory and power to her family. However, Yang Yuhuan does not position herself in the traditional sense as a favored concubine, but rather as someone who wants to gain the full and exclusive love of Li Longji. Based on this, she showed her displeasure to the emperor at the beginning when she found out that Li Longji was having an affair with her sister Lady Guoguo, and forced concubine Mei to move to east building out of jealousy, which shows her capricious and jealous character. Because of Lady Guoguo affair, Yuhuan was sent back to her mother's home until Gao Lux brought Yang Yuhuan the news that Li Longji sighed in the palace for a long time and advised Yang Yuhuan to win back the emperor's heart with a strand of hair. This shows that she learned the way to get along with her lover. During the Maweiyi mutiny, Li Longji wanted to protect Yang Guifei from the beginning to the end, but in such a situation, Yang Guifei decided to give up her life in order to save her lover Li Longji. Emperor Tang Xuanzong refused to give Yang Guifei death again and again, while Yang Guifei begged for death three times. In these three pleas, she gained insight into her mission - to sacrifice her life to protect Li Longji and the Tang Dynasty, and she had felt pure love. In order to protect her beloved, she was willingly given death. At this point in the plot, Yang Yuhuan's image is no longer just a spoiled and jealous imperial concubine of Li Longji, but a brave woman who can sacrifice her life to protect her loved in critical situations. Yang Guifei's love has grown from being obsessively passionate and suspicious and jealous to giving up her life for the one she loves.

The greatest change in Yang Yuhuan's thinking is highlighted in the part of her experience of being given death and her soul's wandering outside. Wandering soul

as the third perspective, let Yang Yuhuan from different positions to re-view what has happened and what is happening, and this special perspective allows her to observe everything around her from an objective point of view and find that things are not what she thought they were, thus gaining insight and reflection on her own behavior. This new understanding and reflection did not happen overnight. In "Ming Zhui ", Yang Yuhuan saw the tragic state of her siblings Lady Guoguo and Yang Guozhong when they were taken away by ghost pawns and bull-headed nightjars, and her immediate reflection on the incident was superficial, as she only complained about abandoning her glory and leaving behind a sinful fate, not really realizing her own culpability in the Maweiyi mutiny. But this shift in perspective and identity serves as an opportunity for her to reassess her previous life and experiences. In "Love Regret," Yang Yuhuan's attitude toward her own life and the death of her mother's family changes dramatically from one of complaint to one of serious reflection on what happened before, realizing that her own favor led to the power of her siblings, and it was the emperor's indulgence and even his ability to pour everything into her that led to the tragedy. This reflection and repentance sublimates Yang Yuhuan's image, from a profiteer who enjoys the convenience of power to a critic who can look at the events rationally, which is the greatest progress and growth of Yang Yuhuan.

4.2. Bottom Narrative

The postmodern narrative proposed by Liotta is a rebellion and questioning of the meta-narrative, i.e., the dissolution of the grand narrative, and proposes the tiny narrative, i.e., the marginal characters, the underclass characters as the subjects of the narrative. In the article "How does contemporary literature represent the underclass? --From the debate on the position of underclass writing", Wang Xiaohua defines the concept of "bottom" in three levels: "1. political level - at the bottom of the ladder of rights, it is difficult to rely on imperfect institutional forces to protect their interests, lacking the consciousness and effective path to exercise their rights; 2. The economic level - the lack of means of production and livelihood, the lack of capital to play in the market system, can only maintain a minimum of survival; 3. the cultural level - neither sufficient voice, and generally do not have the ability to fully express themselves, and thus their desires need to be represented by others, at least temporarily." [7] Although it defines the "underclass" in contemporary literature, it can also be used to a certain extent to define the characters that appear in classical drama. From this perspective, The Palace of Eternal Life is not only about the love and political events of emperors and concubines, but also to a certain extent about the small characters of the "lower class". The vivid portrayal of the underclass characters fully reflects the underclass narrative.

In "The Palace of Eternal Life", the most typical character writing of the lower class is the play of "Serve Fruit", which mainly narrates the birthday of Yang Guifei was approaching, as the emperor loved his concubine, who was fond of fresh lychee, the emperor ordered his envoys to transport fresh lychee from Fuzhou and Hainan to the capital as quickly as possible. In transit, because the horse speed was too fast, ramming and trampling passers-by, trampling farmland seedlings, the post also because of the shortage of money and food, there were not enough horses with the delivery of fresh lychee. The play is a direct criticism of Li Longji's lascivious behavior in order to win the favor of his concubine through their descriptions and encounters from the perspective of the envoys, farmers, blind fortune tellers, and post officers. These characters all fit Wang Xiaohua's definition of the "lower class" to a certain extent: Almost all of them were at the lower end of the power ladder, and even ambassadors and post officials could not rely on the system to protect their rights and interests, and they lack the means of production and livelihood, so even if they speak out, they are ignored or do not have the conditions or means to do so.

The envoys who carried lychee and the post officers who provided post-horses were also victims of long-distance transport of fresh lychee. The edible period of litchi is short, so lychee has to be transported by fast horse, and this kind of transportation of fresh lychee is not a whim, occasionally, but "annual tribute". The envoys knew that they were destroying fields and hurting pedestrians, but they became numb under the weight. The situation of the post officers and envoys was very miserable, even the officials were not spared in this situation, and this showed that the post officers and envoys, who should have been vested interests, lost their right of speech and could not protect their own interests under the condition that they had to pay lychee every year.

By vividly portraying the misfortunes of both the abuser and the victim in the process of transporting lychees, author Hong Sheng fully reflects the powerlessness and dissonance of the underclass characters in the whole incident. In traditional Chinese writing, literary creators are often asked to "write to carry the Dao", that is, to write for righteousness as a carrier, serving the "Dao" that is disseminated, usually requiring creators to use grand narratives to create. However, "The Palace of Eternal Life" has a rare portrayal of the living environment and plight of the underclass characters, which is often neglected under the grand narrative, thus revealing its postmodernist characteristics.

5. CONCLUSION

Whether in terms of power, dreams or narrative, "The Palace of Eternal Life" exhibits some of the

characteristics of postmodernism to a certain extent. As a traditional Chinese classical drama a century before the postmodernist literary theory was proposed, "The Palace of Eternal Life" is undoubtedly an epochal and pioneering classic drama.

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