

A Primary Study on “Love” Motif in Western Poems

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Abstract—There are too many well-known fabulous western poems with the theme of “love” and they have different ways to express. This paper summed up some representative western poems and analyzed their different visions of love. The author also compared the western love motif with Chinese traditional love view to promote the culture convergence.

Keywords- western poem; love; motif; culture

I. INTRODUCTION

As an important literary form, poem records the life of human being in the course of human civilization and provides a convenient approach to express the inner feelings. Love, however, expresses the strong resonance of human's inner feelings as an eternal theme. Actually, love and marriage are the presentation of a nation's deep culture, so the “love” motif appears with the poem almost at the same time. The poems with “love” motif are extremely common and everlasting.

The western love originates from Greece in 8th century, which is later than the epic, but it develops quickly as people have strong and strong desire for love. Therefore, more and more poems were published with the theme of “love”.

II. “LOVE” MOTIF IN WESTERN POEMS

Lyric (love) poetry started in Western Europe in B.C. 6-8 Century. Encountering too many troubles and unsatisfied emotions, Sappho (a female poet) was famous for writing love and wedding poems which were full of emotion with sincerity, soft and gentle beauty, simple and unadorned language. She is the first female poet being famous for her loving poetry in the world.

The most impressed poem with “love” motif in western countries is the knight loving poem. Those knights have their noblewomen to admire and love. They are willing to adventure, fight bravely regardless of themselves in order to please those attractive women. But it is a kind of abnormal extramarital affair for being without the final goal of marriage. This love is separated from marriage. In that era, the most famous loving poem is “Dawn Song”, which describes their inextricable feeling between the knight and his woman in the early morning, without avoiding the description of carnal love. It has the meaning to criticize the asceticism. Under the feudal system, man and woman have no foundation of love to get married for nagging restraints and constraints. While the ideal and free chivalry takes an effect as compensation. The chivalry originates from, Provence, the south of France, then it is spread to Italy,

German and Britain. Marx and Engels gave high opinion on Provence, “it is the first place creates a standard language in modern times. Its poem is an example out the reach of all Latin language nations, even including German and Britain”. The knight loving poem in Century 12 and 13 contributes a lot to the development of European (loving) poems.

Dante wrote a group of loving poems to his lover, Beatrice, “Rebirth”. It is a poem with the feature of memoir and penitential, while its “spiritual love” is the embodiment of Platonic love philosophy. He opposes the vulgar love and hates those who thinking love as the satisfaction of passion and the path to benefit. He promotes the essence of love of being true, kind and beautiful, taking it as the exaltation of spirit and the eternal beauty in the world. Dante's love view integrates multiple features in the special transitional era between the feudalism and capitalism. He is eager to the piousness to the religion and praise the pure love of humanism.

“Human is the core of the universe” is put forward in the renaissance. Theocracy is opposed by the power of human being and the value of people is affirmed. So love, which is a main part in personal emotion, is promoted. In this era, the poem is full of love but no theocracy. Francisco Petrarch (1304—1374) speaks high of Laura's posture and spiritual beautifulness in his famous *Canzoniere*. Spencer (1820-1903) writes a famous poem for praising his lover Elizabeth, which has 89 sonnet poems. See the 70th in his poem:

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves and washed it away.
Agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
But came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.“Vayne man,” sayd she, “that does in vayne assay, A mortall thing so to immortalize,

For I my selve shall lyke to this decay,
And eek my name be wyped out lykewize.
Not so,” quod I, “let baser things devize,
To dy in dust, but you shall live by fame:
My verseyourvertuesraeshalleternize,
And in the heavens wryte your glorious name.
Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
Our love shall live, and later life renew.”The simple and natural love bursts into the inner side of the poet and the reader shares the happiness and worries while the poetic style shows fresh and simple beauty.

The great dramatist, Shakespeare presents his love view in his sonnets, which includes gender equality and humanistic thought of adoring. Among his works, the

characters from different families have significant bodies and personalities, also their emotions with the brand of class. Shakespeare has a single standard: the final result of the man and woman in his works should love each other and finally get married to enjoy the common life. It is true as the comedy, or as the tragedy. He is the one who believes in love and marriage as one and proposes the happy love should be the two get married and live together. It is significantly different from the knight love.

For the booming development of the drama and novel, western poems decrease to the second position but still with many fabulous works. For instance, Ben Jonson, he is a famous traditional dramatist who focuses on satirizing bad habits and affairs in the society. But he is also the leader of Britain poems and his gentle loving poem "A Song to Celia" is popular and changed to a song for its simple and gentle style. In this era, the most famous poet being good at loving romance is Robert Herrick. Literary History of Cambridge said: "It is strange that Herrick is not famous until the end of Century 18, when he obtained the honor of "the Greatest Loving Poet in Britain". By this time no one dare to depose him from this position". He has a lot of famous works such as Enjoy the Beautiful Spring, The Clothes of Julia, Ponder to My Lover, Daisy-Wait Me, The Music of the Night – to Julia, Green Pasture. He combines sincere love with the natural scenery to form a special style poem with the feature of folk songs.

Another poet with the equal fame of Herrick is Richard Fleiss. His two representative works are Go to the Battle and Say Goodbye to Locust, To Athina in the Prison. The two poems see love as the most precious emotion in the world. The soldiers go to the battle to fight with the enemies to render the service to their nation, but the poet gives emphasis that he would lose the title of hero if one does not go to the battle for attaching love and become a coward who is afraid of death. Then he would be looked down upon and abandoned by his lover, so in his poem he said:

Really, a new woman I want,
The first enemy in the battle,
I wanna hug with stronger belief,
The sword, the horse and the silver shield,
I am so unfaithful,
But you must admire and praise as the same,
Oh, dear, if I do not love the honor,
How I love you sincerely.

He strives for the honor in order to earn the respect and love of his woman, which is similar with Don Quixote, who goes out to help those in danger and trouble to uphold the justice in order to praise his woman Toboso- a woman raising pigs. Another poem of Richard Fleiss is written in the prison. He was arrested for showing sympathy for the Royalist Party. His love came to see him. He was so excited and immersed himself in the love, ignoring he was in the prison at that time, even though he thought that he enjoys the most freedom which even exceeds the bird flying in the sky, the fish in the sea and the wind raising waves.

The Britain metaphysical poet Donne in Century 17 shows his deep thinking and broad knowledge in his poems, which is rare in other poems. His poem of Song is changed

into a popular song. The poet holds the suspended attitude to treat the love, but actually full of indignation and sneer. He hates that pure and simple love is so difficult to get. He often uses impossible things in his poem, for example, "to grasp a fallen star", "to split the feet of the devil", "tell me where the snow goes last year"... also, he said that women usually are skittish, frivolous and unbelievable; lastly, he said it is impossible to find a pretty and dedicated lady even you go far away, walking over the world and experience thousands of years. Obviously he denies the love in this poem. However, he sees love as the most holy thing and shows a positive attitude in his other poem Canonization. He warns people that: why you intervene our love? We love each other and none of your business. Our love is holy and we two can combine together. Both we are willing to die to become the saint of love. The two poems are structured from two different points and this metaphysical love view is appreciated by some poets such as Eliot.

In Century 19, the feudal influence collapse and the science flourishing. People have open mind on knowledge and personal freedom is emphasized. The image of common people was thriving in the poetic circles. The poems inherited the advantages of that in the Renaissance but developed. At the mean time, the western poems developed into a higher level from its ideology and artistry. In the Renaissance, most of the loving poems focused on "a perfect match between a man and a girl, love each other, make a family, live happily together", which is the highest happiness, even without the exception of Shakespeare. While the loving poems in Century 19 were gradually free from the mode of "a hero and a pretty girl, perfect love", but went toward to the state of common love between a man and a woman. Robert Pence describes an experience of a old couple in his John Anderson, I Love. He praises the eternal love between the old could in the mouth of the old woman, which is rare before in poems and the content is profound and touching.

The outstanding romantic poets show fresh thinking and meaningful and lasting charm in their poems, such as "Lucy" of Wordsworth, "When a Lamp is broken" of Shelley, "Brilliant Stars" of Keats. Those poems have much more meaningful connotation than the poems in the last such as "Love" and sonnets. Certainly, they show different artistic features in their poems, but the most famous one is Mrs. Browning. In her poem, the joy of getting a new lease, the fire passion, each word and sentence seem from the heart and show us a broad and graceful spiritual world.

Therefore, love is an eternal motif in western poems from the ancient and it is inherited and developed in modern times. They are different in both the presentation and the connotation, but it is still the expression of people's self-identified mentality and the ethnic culture in each era.

III. THE LOVE MOTIF COMPARISON BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN POEMS

It is generally acknowledged that the "love" motif plays a significant part in western poems while it is pale in Chinese poems. In fact, it is a kind of misunderstanding.

Actually, Chinese "loving poem" appears much earlier. For instance, The Book of Songs was written between

Century 11 B.C. and Century 6 B.C., in which the first chapter “Guan Sui” describes the sincere and brave emotion between young man and girls in the very beginning. There are other chapters similarly in its love expression, such as “Jianjia”. “Quiet Lady”, “Out of the East Gate”. The more classical work is the Books of Songs, in which the lady falls in love with a man often in the poems, for instance, “Grasswort”, “South Prunus Mume”, “Pao You Kuye”, “Jianxi”, “Cypress Boat”, “Cunning Boy”, as well as “My Robe”. This is rare in the ancient Greece and Rome. It is a pity, however, the voice of the woman to speak their minds directly and reveal the inner minds with enthusiasm and passion fades in the feudal society. Even in a period it is a blank silence, so the misunderstanding that Chinese poems have less loving works than the western ones. What is the reason? It is the principle of feudal moral conduct proposed by the Confucian School in the special feudal society. The man in the feudal society pursues three main dreams of “contributions, morals and reputations”, while woman is just a kind of accessory thing without independent personality. The natural responsibilities for a woman in the society are to cook, clean and give a birth to a baby. There are no any couples like congenial friends in the world according to the Confucian School. Certainly, there is no mutual understanding and compatibility between couples for such a wide gap between them in the special feudal society.

On the other hand, in the western feudal society, woman enjoys a higher status in the society for the Legend of Christ Child in Roman Catholic and Christianity, as well as under the influence of the chivalry. At that time, the man calls their wife as “my better half”, which is totally different as Chinese man calls as “Jiannei” and “Zhuojin”. The beautiful posture and facial feature of a woman is appreciated by the man both in China and western countries, but western people pay more attention to their personality, courage, interests and even knowledge. So there is a wide range of motifs in western poems, so as multiple subjects. It is much more complex than the Chinese poems that paying more attention to the fact and the affair. Sure, it is no doubt that the thinking of “man

is superior to woman” is also commonly exists in western feudal and bourgeois society, but Chinese poems and western poems are different in the degree and performance. In addition, the “love” motif is significantly different in Chinese poems and western poems based on the foundation of their religions, pattern of manifestation and writing style.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Western culture is a kind of culture featuring with the radicalism, individuality, openness and absorption, so their expression in love is bold and unrestrained in their poems. Though plaintiff is not positive, it is not a good thing to apply the openness without restrictions. Therefore, we should see the love and hate expressions in both Chinese and western poems objectively. The western poems only can be appreciated with the attitude to understand dialectically. In the mean time, we should learn to absorb the essence of Chinese poems and borrow the advantages of western poems to bring the traditional Chinese culture to the world so as to promote and develop the world culture in the true sense.

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