

On the Artistic Charm in “A Dream of Red Mansions”

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Abstract—Artistic Charm is the aesthetic ideal of classical art. It is the spiritual home of Asians pursuing free life. It is not only ancient and modern writers and artists who adopt aesthetic standards when writing, but ancient and modern art critics when reviewing merits. Artistic charm is not only rich in flavor, but also leads readers to meaningful afterthoughts. This article makes a detailed discussion about artistic charm on “A tipsy Xiang-Yun sleeping”, “San-Jie Suicide”, “Tan-Chun marrying”, and “Dai-Yu burying fallen flowers”, which are selected from “A Dream of Red Mansions”.

Keywords—*A Dream of Red Mansions; Artistic charm; Aesthetic Ideal*

I. INTRODUCTION

Artistic charm is the aesthetic ideal of classical art. It is the spiritual home of Asians who are pursuing free life. It is not only ancient and modern writers and artists who adopt aesthetic standards when writing, but also ancient and modern art critics when reviewing merits. Only by allowing the readers to have “infinite imagination”, can works create beautiful artistic charm. Only works with profound artistic charm can be called excellent works of art. Artistic charm of “A Dream of Red Mansions” is this kind.

“*A Dream of Red Mansions*” is very readable, because it has a deep sentiment created by describing almost all our cultures: lyre-playing, chess, calligraphy and painting; poetry; archery on horseback; jeweled palaces and pavilions; Chinese medicines and all kinds of beautiful flowers; the beauty of the snow and moon; guessing games; young loves; songs and laughs; and the fickleness of the old society. It pays particular attention to “image” and “charm”, creating a series of meaningful artistic charm in Chinese literary history: Dai-Yu entering the mansion, the first meeting of Bao and Dai, Bao and Dai reading poetry, a tipsy Xiang-Yun sleeping, San-Jie’s suicide, Tan-Chun marrying, Dai-Yu burying fallen flowers ... All these classical stories create beautiful artistic charm, which makes readers feel good; they cannot help but praise the works.

II. A TIPSY XIANG-YUN SLEEPING

“A tipsy Xiang-Yun sleeping” is a nice description, with combination of stillness and motion, full of poetic and pictorial splendor.

Shi Xiang-Yun is the author’s most favorable figure. Her style, personality and temperament give readers cheerful, frank, and candid feelings. Just like the lyrics from *Sadness Behind Joy*: “She was born with liberty...just like bright moon and fresh breeze in a hall of jade.” Her artistic image has a special brilliance and glamour. For example, the poem she blurted out is the most outstanding masterpiece of Begonia Society; pretending to be Bao-Yu reveals her more adorable aspect; when talking about the poet she can always flow on without stopping; the charm and style she has when drunkenly sleeping in the peony is unique.

The song of Dai-Yu is a sad and mournful piece of music, while that of Xiangyun is a beautiful touching piece of light music.

Dai-Yu is worthy of mercy; Bao-Chai is worldly; Xi-Feng is hateful; while Xiang-Yun gets our absolute preference. Is there anyone who doesn’t like the young, bold and straightforward lady? Xiang-Yun has both the demeanor of a grand girl in the feudal society, and a bold magnanimous character that the other girls in the Grand View Garden don’t have.

Chapter sixty-two - “A tipsy Xiang-Yun sleeps on a peony-petal pillow” best describes the liberal and open-minded Shi Xiang-Yun. All the girls were elegantly drinking and playing games; only Xiang-Yun was impatient and playing finger guessing games with Bao-Yu, shouting irregularly out “three” and “five”, and laughing out the words: “Now there’s a nice, simple, lively game! There’s a game that suits me down to the ground!” Put simply, she was like a man with a determination to get drunk. In Jia mansion “many beautiful Misses were drinking, playing and dancing in the hall, and it was very bustling” - only Xiang-Yun disappeared. Then a giggling young maid came and said: “Come and look, everyone!” “Miss Yun must have been feeling drunk and gone out for some air. She’s lying on the granite bench behind the rockery, fast asleep.” Everyone came to see “Xiang-Yun on a large stone bench in a hidden corner of the rockery, dead to the world. She was covered all over from head to foot with crimson petals from the peony bushes which grew round about; the fan which had slipped from her hand and lay on the ground beside her was half buried in petals; and heaped-up peony petals wrapped in a white silk handkerchief made an improvised pillow for her head. Over and around this petalled

monstrosity convocation of bees and butterflies was hovering distractedly. It was a sight that the cousins found both touching and comical. They made haste to rouse her and lifted her up into a half-sitting position on the bench. But Xiang-Yun was still playing drinking games in her dream and proceeded to recite the words of an imaginary forfeit, though her eyes were tightly closed.”

This is a picture of young girl sleeping in the spring, using: sound, color, fragrance, dream and poetic scenery. On a large stone bench in a hidden corner of the rockery, tipsy Xiang-Yun was asleep. This is a world with falling petals everywhere. Flying peony petals fell on the face and beautiful clothes of Xiang-Yun; even the fallen fun was half buried in petals. How nice and quiet the scenery is! In the peaceful and quiet garden, the noise of bustling bees, dreaming words, and the giggle of maids broke the peace and woke Xiang-Yun’s dream. The description was full of affection and life, with the perfect combination of stillness and motion, which gives the reader endless thought.

All kinds of drunkenness can be found throughout *A Dream of Red Mansions*: Xi-Feng splashing vinegar, Liu sampling the sleeping accommodation at Green Delights, Bao-Yu drunk to drive the wet nurse, the girls and maids singing drunk songs without feeling shy or ashamed. However, Xiang-Yun’s drunkenness is quite unique: sleeping behind the rockery, the granite bench as her bed, fallen petals as her pillows, mumbling the dreaming words in drunkenness – it reveals her to be liberal and open-minded. In the ancient China, with the feudal ethical code, the three obedience’s, and the four virtues - which grand girls dared to drink, to speak aloud, to laugh without worrying? Her liberal and open-minded character brought the gloomy Grand View Garden an atmosphere of rebirth and freshness. That is why the expert on *A Dream of Red Mansions* Zhou Ruchang said: He likes Shi Xiang-Yun most.

III. SAN-JIE SUICIDE

Miss You, the last pretty of the Kingdom of the Gorgeous, is a warrior in her love story; she deserves our respect and admiration. Miss You not only seems like the most beautiful rose with thorns in the Grand View Garden, but also the most eye-catching red lotus that emerges unstained from the filth. In short, Miss You is a gorgeous girl with elegance and firmness; her temperament in particular will overshadow any other beauties. She can also be compared to the 12 Ladies.

Miss You, stronger than Dai-Yu, franker than Bao-Yu, more unyielding than Xiang-Yun, more innocent than Tan-Chun and more lovely than Sister You, is the natural gift as far as Jia-Lian concerned. Although the writer didn’t describe her a lot, she did catch the attention of all readers — she is one of few in the Grand View Garden that is bold and unconstrained to behave herself. She never yields to her destiny but make every effort to seek her love, which is indeed precious in the Grand View Garden, as well as appreciated and respected by the writer and readers.

In the Grand View Garden, the people only know of eating, drinking and making merry; letting tomorrow look

after itself. But she was vigorous and elegant, even rowing and grieved. In order to get her true love and defend her dignity, she fearlessly drew the sword and contemplated her suicide. She could die for her true love, but unfortunately she was in the Jia mansion and was misunderstood by Jia Lian, which made her life more regrettable. She had the Duck hidden behind her back and said, “Here is your pledge back.” “The tears were pouring down her cheeks like rain. She held out the scabbard with the single sword in her left hand. As Xiang-Lian took it, she whipped the other sword out with her right hand and slashed it across her throat.” It was pity that “Red scatter of broken blossoms, and the jade column fallen, never to rise again...” Liu Xiang-Lian lifted up his voice and wept out “I didn’t know she had a noble heart and was so respectable.” In that moment he knew that San Jie had a rare combination of beauty and resoluteness; and he was very regretful. Uncertain whether or not he had been dreaming, Xiang-Lian felt as if a douche of icy water had penetrated him to the bone with its coldness. Without a moment’s hesitation he drew the companionless Drake out of its scabbard, stretched out his queue, slashed through the unnumbered strands which bind us to the world and its annoys, and as soon as the Taoist was ready, followed him out into the world.

The biggest pity in regards to San-Jie is not her suicide, but that no one could understand her. Even after her death the man she loved had given her only regret, rather than his love, which she had been in persistent pursuit of. She sacrificed everything, but still had nothing in the end. Liu Xianglian had a regret, and decided to love no one ever after. Of course, it is the true love of San-Jie that makes him reach such a decision. How can “San-Jie Suicide” not make people sad and sorry!

IV. TAN-CHUN MARRING TO A FAR PLACE

If the “San-Jie Suicide” is a tragedy, then “Tan-Chun marrying to a far place” is another tragedy coming from the author’s elaborate description. The words, “being smart and ambitious but unfortunate to be born in the last years of feudalism” are the best portrayal of Tan Chun. The description of kites and the seabed implies her marriage to a far place.

Tan-Chun is like her nickname “Rose”, beautiful but pricking. She was born with twinkling eyes and slender eyebrows that make people forget this world. She, different to Bao-Chai, dared to speak and dared to act. Different to Xiang-Yun, she did not wear cosmetics. Different to Xi-Feng, she was strict with herself and impartial. Although she was a young lady of a big, noble family, her resolution, courage and sense of justice made her distinctive.

Tan-Chun was the only stateswoman with a sagacious perception. She had foresight, resolution, and determination which were not lost to Xi-Feng. She proposed a series of reform measures: revitalization of plants, increasing income and reducing expenditure, determining the birthright, and classifying different ranks. But in the end she was married off to a far place. It is the tragedy of her life.

The people living in the coastal area caught the brother of the emperor. At that time, Tan-Chun was of marriageable age. She was chosen by the royal family to marry the ruler of the coastal area in order to make peace. To protect her family and country, she marries to the coastal area. In those times, it was not easy for a wife to visit the parental home; let alone return to the homeland married to the minority ruled.

“Standing at the riverbank to look at the direction of homeland, Tan-Chun’s desire to return to homeland is just a dream.” Her song, “Separating with Family”, brings more sadness. This song describes such a story: marrying to a far place. Leaving her homeland and separating from her family, she wished for her parents not to miss her. She wished that both her family and herself could live without mishap. However, her faraway marriage is not so bad. In the end, the other two ladies in Family Jia also left the family: Ying-chun got married; Yuan-Chun died.

V. DAI-YU BURING FALLEN FLOWERS

“Lin Dai-Yu Buries Fallen Flowers” is another sentimental plot, and another tragedy.

The author compares the destiny of females to the fallen flowers in “The Song of Burying Flowers”. This song represents the sentimental emotion of females. It is both discontent and accusation. Lin Dai-Yu’s crying for the fallen flowers expresses her sense of frustration: frustration of golden age, love, and life value. This emotion brings the song a sense of desolation. But she still desires for a true love. In this noble family, she devotes herself to the love with Bao-Yu, never covering her joys and sorrows up. She cries because of sadness and creates the elegant poems.

The young ladies in Family Jia can be likened to living in a cage. No one knows their fate. Dai-Yu’s poem expresses her uncertainty about the future. In her poem, she compares nature to the grim surroundings and expresses her pain. Thus she wishes she could have wings and fly to happiness with the flowers. But she does not have wings; and she cannot find where the happiness is. She foresees her destiny through the fall of flowers. In her poem, it seems that she becomes the flowers and shares the fate of flowers. The integration of Dai-Yu and the fallen flowers creates a plaintive emotion.

It is the artistic conception supplying some room to show empathy that makes “Dream of Red Mansions” appeal to readers. Dai-Yu, on the one hand, longs to get rid of an ugly world, breaking away from the shackles of feudalism, and struggling against the feudal ethics, thus pursuing freedom and happiness. On the other hand, she knows she depends on Family Jia for living and could not determine her fate. Therefore, when she sees the flowers falling down, she laments, “Today I bury the fallen flowers, but tomorrow who will bury me if I die?” The talented lady expresses not only her grief over the fall of flowers but also her content against the feudalism.

“The Song of Burying Flowers” is a song describing both Dai-Yu’s love and her tragedy. We could say Dai-Yu is

not burying flowers but burying her own youth and love. It could also be said that, actually, it is the author Cao Xue-Qin burying his youth and love. If Cao Xue-Qin is the prototype of Jia Bao-Yu, the story of Lin Dai-Yu could be the story of Cao Xue-Qin.

VI. CONCLUSION

A Dream of Red Mansions leaves readers other classical artistic charms: Bao-Chai entering the Mansion, Bao-Yu breaking his lock, Bao-Chai catching butterflies, Yuan-Chun visited her mother’s home after marriage, Xi-chun cutting her hair to be a nun, Qing-wen tearing the fun, Feng-jie raiding, Bao-Yu cutting his hair to be a monk...there are numerous artistic charms to enumerate and so many fascinating charms that readers, just like drinking, could not stop reading...

You would naturally feel that the figures in *A Dream of Red Mansions* came your with smiles; as though you were in the Grand View garden. Bao-Yu, Dai-Yu, Bao-Chai, Xiang-Yun, Tan-Chun, Miao-Yun and all the sister’s were friendly to you when you were making poetry and drawing pictures, appreciating the beauty of the snow and the moon, guessing riddles, laughing and drinking.

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