

# A Comparative Study of “The Lady of Musashino” and “Red and Black”

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**Abstract**—The “Red and Black” written by French great writer Stendhal in the 19th century opened up a precedent for “Psychological Novel”. More than a hundred years later, in the 1940s, “The lady of Musashino” written by a Japanese post-war writer Shohei Ooka, illuminated the post-war Japanese literary world with its purely literary beauty, and was hailed as a successful example to apply French psychological novel’s writing techniques into modern Japanese literature. Due to Shohei Ooka’s long-term study of Stendhal’s literature, there are many places in his works that can be seen the influence of Stendhal’s literature. This article aims to compare the two classic works with a focus on storyline, characters, psychological descriptions, and social themes.

**Keywords**—the lady of Musashino; Red and Black; comparative study

## I. INTRODUCTION

“The lady of Musashino” is the first love story of Japan’s famous postwar writer Shohei Ooka. It was serialized in “Group image” since January 1950. After publication, it received extensive attention and became one of the best-selling books of the time. Also it is Shohei Ooka’s important representative work which established his status in Japanese literary world. The use of a large number of psychological descriptions in the novel has enriched the text in many ways and has been hailed as a successful example of the application of French psychological novel’s creation technology into modern Japanese literature. This is inseparable from Shohei Ooka’s long-term research in French literature. As an admirer of Stendhal, Shohei Ooka translated several works of Stendhal which played a very important role in the dissemination of Stendhal’s literature in Japan. As a result, the influence of Stendhal’s literature has been reflected in many of his works. In the “The Lady of Musashino”, there are many places where Stendhal’s masterpiece “Red and Black” can be seen. This article will try to compare these two classic works around the storyline, characters, psychological descriptions, and social themes.

## II. COMPARISON OF STORYLINE AND CHARACTER

The story of “The lady of Musashino” occurred in 1947 after Japan’s postwar abolition of adultery. The kind and virtuous actress Michiko Akiyama has not been loved by her husband Tadao Akiyama, but she still maintains her wife’s

identity. Although she truly loves her cousin Tsutomu Miyaji who is a demobilized soldier, but she has suppressed her feelings and has not crossed the bottom line. However, Tadao committed adultery with the wife of her brother Tomiko on her back. Finally, Michiko committed suicide because of her husband’s abandonment and her lover’s betrayal.

The story of “Red and Black” occurred on the eve of the French July Revolution in 1830. The protagonist Julien was the son of a carpenter and was smart and talented. He tutored in the local mayor De. Lena’s house, he tempted the mayor’s wife. After the disclosure of his adultery with Mayor’s wife, he fled into the seminary. Later he was recommended by the dean of the seminary and become the private secretary of the Marquis De. Lamar is the backbone of extreme royalist party. And then he had an affair with the Marquis’s daughter. As he was about to become successful in his official career, he was revealed by a letter from the mayor’s wife. In angrily, he shot and wounded the mayor’s wife and sent himself to the guillotine.

As mentioned above, there is a common plot in both works that is the adultery of the beautiful boy and his wife. In “The lady of Musashino” he describes two pairs of adultery men and women, one is Tadao Akiyama and Tomiko, who have achieved adultery, and the other is Michiko Akiyama and Tsutomu Miyaji who did not achieve adultery. The design of the story is carried out in two lines, but the two are not unrelated. The adultery of Tadao Akiyama and Tomiko contrasts the pure and sincere feelings between Michiko Akiyama and Tsutomu Miyaji and at the same time aggravates the arrival of Michiko’s tragic fate. The coexistence of the two story lines and intertwined together along with the ambiguous relationship between Tomiko and Tsutomu Miyaji which intensified the contradictions in the story and brought the story to a climax. In contrast, “Red and Black” shows the two loves of the hero Julien, closely surrounding the single experience of Julien. This storyline runs through the three scenes in Mayor’s house, seminary and Marquis’s house that concentrated reflect the social state of society at the time. Julien’s love with the mayor’s wife and the Marquis’s daughter are all mixed with complex political color and class conflicts. The seemingly single-line plot is actually clear and interlocking with each other, and the story is full of ups and downs.

It can be seen that although the two works designed similar adultery plots, the plots were not developed in the same way.

This made the heroes and heroines who appeared in the plot have differences in their personalities. Although the male protagonists of both works are beautiful teenagers who fall in love with other people's wives, the two have great contrasts in their personalities. After Tsutomu Miyaji returning to his home country from army, he became tired of the life of rogue indulgence and later went to the "Gully" full of his childhood memories. He fell in love with his married sister Michiko Akiyama. Although he also knew what Michiko Akiyama felt about him, he eventually betrayed the "vote" between them. In this relationship with the Michiko Akiyama, Tsutomu Miyaji is decadent, depraved and cowardly. From him it could reflect the mental outlook of the Japanese youth participating in the military in the post-war society. As a carpenter's son, Julien always dream to be successful and rich. He attacked and deliberately shuttled to the feudal aristocracy. At the mayor's house, he took revenge and tested his gutsy adventure psychology, so he had a relationship with the mayor's wife. At the seminary he disguised himself and bowed down to win the favor of the dean priest. At the Marquis De Lamar's house, by virtue of his outstanding talents, judged the situation, he received Marquis' appreciation and reuse, and won the hearts of Marquis' daughter. In each storyline, his body is full of the vanity and ambition of bottom young people in the feudal society.

Compared with the obvious difference in the hero's images, there are many similarities between the two works in the image of the heroine. Mrs. De. Lena and Michiko Akiyama are both good and virtuous women, full of desire for love. But this desire cannot be achieved in their existing marriages. They are not cherished by their husbands, but because of the shackles of tradition and morality, they lack the courage to pursue true love. At this point Mrs. De. Lenais is braver than Michiko Akiyama. Although she had rejected and confused when she was pursued by Julien, she accepted him eventually and began an unforgettable love relationship with him. Also she finally revealed her heart to her lover Julien and revealed her feelings to him boldly. But although Michiko Akiyama loved Tsutomu Miyaji, she did not cross the bottom line in the end. She hoped to maintain the love of the two in an "oval" manner. Until she committed suicide, her feelings with Tsutomu Miyaji eventually stopped at the spiritual level.

### III. COMPARISON OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Stendhal, known as the "great psychological writer", has wonderfully demonstrated his outstanding psychological description talent in "Red and Black". Stendhal pays special attention to the description of the process of changes in character's psychology, and is particularly good at creating vivid characters by showing the inner conflicts of them. For example, in the "Red and black" when Mrs. De. Lena discovered that she fell in love with Julien, Stendhal expressed her complex mentality completely in front of the reader with a fierce and straightforward character inner monologue. "What! I am in love?" "I have love? I, a married woman, I'm in love! But I never experienced such unclear madness with my husband. I always thought about Julien..." The mother of a child and the wife of the mayor actually loved a young man. The contradictions between the emotions of the lady's heart

and the struggles she was struggling with were deeply expressed in this monologue. Let readers see a good woman who longs for love but is trapped in traditional morality.

However, Stendhal's psychological description is not limited to revealing the psychological contradiction of the character. He was also known as the "Observer of human souls" and was also good at revealing the deep motives of character's actions through their inner description. In "Red and Black", there is a period when he enjoy the cool in mayor's house, and the description of "shaking hands" with Mrs. De. Lena and Julien is a wonderful example. Julien held the lady's struggling hand, this incident made him feel that he had succeeded. He experienced unprecedented satisfaction and joy. But this satisfaction and joy did not come from his love for Mrs. De. Lena but from his hatred and revenge against the aristocratic class. As a small intellectual who lives in the bottom of society, he is trapped in the contradiction between inferiority and self-esteem. His heart longs for equality and he wants to be successful. This small action reflected his ambition and revenge on the upper class.

Although there are a large number of psychological descriptions in "The lady of Musashino", Ooka's technique is different from Stendhal's. Throughout the full text, it is difficult to find a psychological description of the intense and straightforward characters' inner monologue in "Red and Black". More often the author gives a psychological overview of the person's mental activity from the perspective of a bystander. For example, in the process of Michiko Akiyama and Tsutomu Miyaji search for the source of Yechuan, when Michiko heard the place name "Love cave", she suddenly realized her feelings for Michiko. "This 'love' is the word that Michiko always hides from. However, it was actually the name of the source of a river that she was exploring together with Tsutomu Miyaji. It seems to indicate that the feeling she feels on the way is what it is with no doubt..." Here Ooka uses a psychological overview technique. But at the same time, in the following description, he added "Michiko's legs were softened", "She looked around", "She looked at her lover", "Michiko left him and walk ahead" and such movements vividly demonstrated her mood completely together with the psychological description.

Another feature of the psychological description in "The lady of Musashino" is the use of scenery. This is one of the most prominent psychological description features of Ooka which different with Stendhal. There is a description of "color butterfly flying" in the novel. Seeing a pair of colorful butterflies flying up and down, Michiko Akiyama and Tsutomu Miyaji invariably compare the pair of butterflies to themselves and each other. It is a pity that the two people have the opposite idea. The two people who are deeply loved with each other both compare themselves to the bottom butterfly. It is difficult to approach the upper one, they suffered from their feelings cannot get return. The psychological description of this "merging feeling with scenery" is very aptly demonstrating the inner world of the two people, and at the same time adding a bit of dismal color to the entire novel.

#### IV. COMPARISON OF SOCIAL THEMES

"Red and Black" as the foundation work of the 19th century French critical realism literature, it has a distinct political color. The title of "Red and Black" itself adopts a symbolic approach. There are roughly two interpretations of its symbolic significance: one is that "red" refers to the red uniform, and "black" refers to the priest's black robe. Another view is that "red" refers to the heroic era of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic War, "black" refers to the shameful restoration era. The subtitle of "Notes of 1830" directly reveals the background of the social age reflected in the works. In 1830, France was on the eve of the July Revolution. It coincided with an era when the various forces of the society were fighting against each other and the rulers were alternately changing. Stendhal took the protagonist Julien under such historic context, using the experience of Julien as a clue to expose the corruption and darkness in the era of restoration.

In the seminary, which is known as hell on earth, the priests of various religious factions are crowding out each other. The incidents in which the students have fallen prey to one another are more and more often. Here, people are hostile to knowledge and advocating ignorance. Through the experience of Julien, Stendhal mercilessly exposes the hypocrisy and ugliness of religious power at that time; In Marquis De Lamar's house, Julien witnessed the secret meetings of nobles and churches. Leaders of the church and nobles gathered together to discuss how to use foreign troops to suppress the domestic revolutionary forces. Although the counter-revolutionary goals are the same, there is an irreconcilable contradiction between them due to their own interests. This secret meeting became a farce for them to attack and criticize each other. Through Julien's eyes, Stendhal vividly demonstrated the egoism and the fear of revolution of social reactionary forces.

In such social context, Julien's ambition of pursuing equality and realizing his own aspirations from the ranks of the civilians can only hide his true self, and use every means to fawn on this twisted external society. It can be said that the society created Julien's hypocrisy and madness, and finally sent him to the guillotine.

If we say that Stendhal complained about the darkness and corruption of the entire era through Julien's tragic destiny, then in "The lady of Musashino", Shohei Ooka uses the "Gully" the stage where story happened as a microcosm of the post-war Japanese society to reflect the defeated Japanese social customs. At the beginning of the novel, it was enveloped in the "post-war" atmosphere, with the enter of Tsutomu Miyaji, this atmosphere became more and more intense. His father was an military officer who committed suicide after defeat. After his demobilization, he inherited a piece of property from his father, but he quickly squandered it. When he once again appeared in front of Michiko Akiyama in the military uniform, Michiko found the original honest Tsutomu has changed his personality greatly after his experiences in army. On the battlefield, he witnessed too many lives and deaths, so he was indifferent when he heard of his father's death, because in his view, death was a relief; he had experienced a period of captive life, and

his experience of captivity caused him to lose trust on people; he lost his virginity while receiving condolences from a female nurse during the war, so that he hang round with female students after demolition in order to experience that similar and unusual feeling. However, for Michiko, he is sincere. So on the night of Xiashan, he did not force his way on her. He cared the way she feels indicating that he has not been hopeless. Unfortunately, he eventually betrayed the "vote" and his betrayal became the most direct cause of Michiko's suicide. Shohei Ooka created a youth image that has been ravaged by war. The spirit of the retired soldiers in the defeated Japanese society at that time can be reflected from the body of Tsutomu. They became decadent and depraved in the destruction and suffering of the war and eventually lost their life directions.

In the story of the novel, there is also a background event that reflects the post-war chaos and decadent social customs, that is the abolition of adultery. Under this premise, for women, it means the liberation under the paternalistic patriarchal system; for men, it means that one can freely approach other's wife without fear of sanctions. The abolition of the crime of adultery has provided conditions for the adultery of Tadao Akiyama and Tomiko, which has accelerated the realization of Tadao Akiyama's desire, and at the same time it also accelerated the arrival of Michiko Akiyama's destiny to be abandoned by her husband. The author reflects the transformation of people's thoughts in the post-war Japanese society through the intricate character relationships in the novel and the ups and downs of each person's inner emotions.

#### V. CONCLUSION

"Red and Black" and "The lady of Musashino" are two classic works separated by more than one hundred years. Despite similar designs in the storyline, the storyline has its own characteristics in developing method. There are also significant differences in the image creation of the hero and heroine. In expressions, Stendhal and Ooka are all good at using the psychological description to show the inner world of the characters. Both of these works show the author's insightful and detailed insight into the characters and their skillful writing skills. Compared with the many direct and intense inner monologue psychological description in "Red and Black", "The lady of Musashino" is more of an objective psychological summary and "merging feeling with scenery" style of psychological description. In terms of the expression of social themes, although the backgrounds of the two works are very different, the authors firmly grasped the social environment at that time and focused on the main contradictions of the society in a limited storyline so as to provide a comprehensive and objective social world to readers. The writer's sense of responsibility and responsibility to society are reflected in them.

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