

The Remain Fear Forever: A Comparative Study between the Romantic Poems of William Blake and Li He

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Abstract:

William Blake, which is one of the most typical and iconic figure during the development of the Western Romantic poetry during the development of traditional literary culture, is usually regarded as the sally port of research by modern people towards their generations with the comparative formal perspective. Meanwhile, Li He is another great poet who is regarded as exemplary of his time and even beyond it. Although Li He's mode of writing is very different from Blake's, the particular genre of poetry represented by him coincides with many features of Western Romantic poetry. This study centers on a careful and precise comparison of the works of the two of them. Some of the classic works of these two poets are analyzed for three branch aspects: the choice of structure, the use of imagery, and the difference in the inner expression of meanings. As a result of both the valuable similarities and specific features that are influenced by different cultural background in their poetry works, this paper generalizes the much deeper and universal characteristics of romantic poetry across cultural backgrounds. Finally, conclusions are drawn through the comparative research that reveals the essential differences between the Western classic poetry in Romanticism and the Eastern classic poetry that is similar to the essential characteristics of Romanticism in three aspects - structure, images and thematic expressions.

Keywords: Romantic poetry; comparative literature; William Blake; Li He.

1. Introduction

William Blake, one of the most famous and iconic poets during the gradual development of romanticism in the western cultural atmosphere, nowadays

is often described as a forerunner by his generations. His texts focus on the development and exploration of initial imagery, without being overly bound by traditional rhythms and forms, yet inheriting the conventions of the Romantic poets in terms of the

subject matter they express. His creative concepts are extremely advanced and involve many types of “quasi-transcendentalist” poetic thinking. It can be said that he made a remarkable and indelible contribution to the gradual modernization of future poetry. “Blake’s reverence for the imagination offered a path to self-help for those bound by rationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as a poetic possibility for the increasingly materialistic and indifferent world of the modern age” [1]. Comparatively, Li He, who is the equally eminent poets in the history of ancient Chinese poetry who are often taken as typical subjects of study, has many characteristics similar to those of William Blake’s creating career. The imagery and writing techniques he utilized are undoubtedly among the best of the conventions of the era. At the same time, he is also committed to the innovation of poetry writing. His presence has broadened the developmental boundaries of traditional Chinese poetry that is once narrow.

“Even though his notoriety has been steadily rising since then, there is still disagreement in the world about both his proper place in the annals of literature and art and the message he is tasked with delivering to future generations—that is, if it can even be called a message at all, as some argue” [1]. Earlier studies have, for the most part, reversed this situation by generalizing the typical poets’ works to a worldwide perspective. But there is seems rarely comparative studies of poets and writers who share the same characteristics with those and who have been neglected with the same unfair destiny. This leads to the fact that their precious works from the specific perspective of cultural differences had been unable to be better analyzed. Thus, this essay will explore it from the perspective of comparative literature. In this paper, the poet conducts a comparative analysis of two works respectively of the two poets, *The Tyger* and *Flying Light*, from three different perspectives, which is precisely showing in structure, the use of images, and inner thematic expression. Additionally, detailed and objective evidence will be presented in full before the conclusion. The benefit of this approach is that it constructs a complete logical chain, helping readers understand the important information conveyed in the texts and the characters of romantic poetry.

2. Comparison of the Framework and Structure

As the outstanding representatives of Western Romantic poetry and Eastern poetry that is similar to the Romanticism, the representative works of the two poets will be displayed and compared in various aspects.

The *Tyger*, one of the most famous and representative

poems during the whole creating career of William Blake, nowadays is sometimes regarded by some researchers as a typical work whose deep theme is opposite to the surface expression. From the perspective of the probable explanation of the structure, the study realizes the deeper intention that the poet has painstakingly created. The poem is divided into four stanzas. There are generally six stanzas. Each stanza, however, becomes more and more intense and direct in its emotional expression. This emotion that on the surface of the narrative and description, may be recognized as a kind of reverence and praise for the “*Tyger*”. It is accepted that Blake’s forest represents corrupted societal customs, constructed political, cultural, and religious structures directed by reason, science, and Satan, which seek to suppress positive human potentials. The hand represents dexterity and craftsmanship, while the eye represents vision, prophecy, sight, creativity, and the gateway to the soul. Similarly, night represents ignorance and wickedness. The situation of a person asking questions and receiving puzzles from a *Tyger* marks the last beginning of awareness and respect for the energies of his own soul [1]. However, further analyzed, as a selfless admiration for the omniscience and omnipotence of the great Creator behind it. Yet, most reviewers have discussed “*The Tyger*” as though it is included in a recent edition of Blake’s entire works, so excluding the visual design element. According to some who have studied its design, the *Tyger* is a “artistic failure” [2]. Even though the poet truly made an effort to disguise his expression, the reader could still feel his hidden disdain and distrust in those gestures those are “frame the symmetry”, “dread the hands and feet”, “terror’s clasp”, “down the spears”, and “make the *Tyger*” etc. On contrasts, the emotion of disdain is typically reflected in these aspects. The first point is that the majestic and beautiful tiger depicted in the text clearly contrasts surprisingly with the dull and fragile tiger in Blake’s painting. It is not difficult to suspect that Blake intended this to be a satire on the so-called “forces of creation”. The second point is that the insane language and irrationality of “I” in the poem also reflect the effect of irony. Thirdly, the so-called the objects in “symmetry” must be detached from nature, and the “creature power” mentioned above can also be regarded as man-made power - the so-called “experience”. In Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *The Lamb*, as opposed to *The Tyger*, is celebrating the beauty and power of nature. As regarding by Parsons C. O., the eighteenth-century natural history boom has been attributed to a number of factors, including the subject’s educational importance, its capacity to amuse and please, its ability to illustrate Divine Providence, and its appeal to artists as “a never failing field to enrich his glowing imagination” [3]. The criticism

and distrust of Blake's power behind the tiger is fully realized. However, those marvelous statements are really there, showing a stark opposition to the deeper meanings. This can be recognized as a paradoxical collision between fantasy and reality from the first person in the logic of the poem. The strong Tyger that is fantasized to be strong is actually vulnerable. Blake makes a startling move to demolish the sense of trust constructed by the fantasies in the poem.

This crazy move may be a rare one to use. But in the ancient China in Tang Dynasty, Li He used similar structural techniques to overthrow constructed fantasies, which is similar to Blake's poetry. In his typical work *Flying Light*, he lit the mythological person and objects out of the poem as imagery. They are always clearly broken, have been deliberately undermined by the poets. But the fact is that they are automatically constructed by default at the very moment the cultural context is formed. And Li He only showed the overthrow part. This is why he quoted these mythological allusions but used them very briefly and elliptically. Li He did not change their inherent status and impression in the historical and mythological context, but directly justified his distrust of them from a subjective point of view. Instead, they become imagery to be overridden by the poet after carrying the original deeper meaning. Rather than something that is merely used for structural construction and then collapses in the ultimate gradual progression, as Blake's does. It is perhaps true that imagery can cause the process of building to be omitted while the process of overthrowing is strongly intensified. At least, Li He successfully reached it as many contemporary poets did.

3. Comparison of the Use of Imagery

What's more, the images that used in these two works are extremely worthy of researching in depth. The study discovers another major obvious difference between Chinese modern poetry and Western Romantic poetry from the perspective of imagery. That is, even though they both resort to rich imagery for lyricism, expression and elaboration, the positioning and status of imagery are very different. In terms of orientation, Romantic poetry is used to appropriating subjective consciousness into objects. Chinese poets, on the other hand, prefer to hide the objective and extensive "rationality" behind the imagery.

The items that have to do with the emotion expressions in the poems seems to be divided in several branches in the viewpoint about different features. Especially, it is enable to conclude them into the disparate cultural writing habits. For instance, in *The Tyger* of William Blake, the choice of imagery is very deliberate. Blake uses the maximized

meaning behind the objects to build a background or premise that is subliminally formed in the reader's mind. As Neupane U. says that in *Symbolism in William Blake's poem Tyger*, the image in his verse is more regularly its claim beginning point, not the conclusion but the starting of the method. He has utilized the images to bring out world. The image in his hand got to be a genuine representation which has evoked the world in terms of itself. Hence, nearly each hypothesis is typical in this typical poem [2]. The hammer, the chain, and the fire, which are the images has been identified with the industrialization of mankind, fully demonstrates Blake's intention to link the creation of the tiger with the artificiality of "experience" in reality. The same attitude and hidden critique of Blake himself is also applied to it. This is obviously different from the direct lyrical approach commonly used in Romanticism. However, it is true that this type of imagery clearly carries the poet's subjective feelings and opinions rather than objective and accomplished ineffable theories or controls. And the subjective feelings will continue to spread until the whole poem. This gives readers a sense of an extremely accelerated rhythm lurking in the development of the poem. But it is also obvious to find imagery that is beyond the subjective creation of the individual in favor of objective atmospheric constructions, usually mythological or historical. And in this poem, he appears in the use of allusion in the fifth stanza: "When the stars threw down their spears, /And water'd heaven with their tears" [4].

However, it seems to be quite different when it comes to the work of Li He that corresponds of *The Tyger*, and that is also concretely referred in the preference of objective over subjective. To be more specific, Li He often used in his poems imagery that is often mentioned in earlier histories and myths as a supplement or even as the subject of his own narratives and descriptions. This is actually very common in Chinese poets of that era. Their works also hardly seems to qualify as a purely personal piece of work, but rather one that has been subjected to varying degrees of external influence. This also leads to a preference for words that are rooted in objective and widespread impressions in their use of imagery. Bao Rongrong, who is the researcher in China said that in Li He's poems, the sun and the moon show his struggles with time. The wind and candles represent his difficult life, and the light of the sword symbolizes his hopes and talents. She thinks that Li He sees his life through light, making his art have a special and cool style [5]. For example, the *Spirit Lady* and *Great Unity*, which are two of the most symbolic features of Chinese traditional culture are used in the poem: "Flying light, flying light—I urge you to drink a cup of wine./ I do not know the height of blue heaven/or the extent of

yellow earth./I only sense the moon's cold./sun's burn, sear us" [6]. What's more, many historical celebrities and allusions are also used by poets to help clarify their expressions. and the frequency of this is very high. As some scholars point out, Li He calls out affectionately, "Flying light, flying light, I urge you to drink a cup of wine", hoping time to stop here. The sun and the moon in the poem are time images with devouring qualities, and "the moon is cold and the sun is warm" is a metaphor for the relentlessness of time. The word "fry" in the poem is used in a very good way, which expresses the preciousness of life and the pain of time in a graphic way. In Li He's poems, the sun and the moon represent his challenges with time. The wind and candles show how hard his life is, while the light from the sword stands for his dreams and skills. In his thought, Li He views his life as bright, which gives his art a unique and interesting style [7]. This is very different from the Romantic poets led by Blake. It is even said that in ancient Chinese poetry, the lyrical subject as well as the logical chain can only be constituted through the linkage of these images which are rich in meanings.

4. Comparison of the Expression of Thematic Thoughts

Obviously, people can perceive a strong sense of "distrust" in the two poems. This is similar to the discrepancy between vision and reality mentioned in previous articles. More than that, they also reflect the poet's personal creative bias and even the common thoughts of creators throughout the times. It is noted that the truth is also as something have been said. In fact, It is something that like to be called "poetic rebellion". This is a subtle generalization. Because the things that each poet in a different culture rebels against do not seem to be the same.

In *The Tyger*, Blake's implicit rebellion is against the "God" whom he celebrates in the text in a false tone. This is not, of course, the deity he had in mind, but is more often recognized as a subtle irony that takes on the maddening tone of the poem. As being mentioned earlier in this article, this is a distrust of "man-made experience". Blake is undoubtedly a fantasist who believes in the religion of nature and purity. For him, the dirtiness of "experience" is intolerable. It also contributes to that distinctive ideological stance he takes in all his works. He rebelled against what stood against the thought of himself. But Li He is different. In *Flying Light*, Li He opposes precisely what is behind his works. These items may be his background, the cornerstone of the poem's creation. In the common cultural atmosphere, Li He's view of life includes searching for the value and meaning of life. This deepens his un-

derstanding of life and death. In his poems, he expresses frustration about not being able to show his talent. He faces the contrast between our short lives and the everlasting universe, trying to bring out a love for life through fears of gods and ghosts [7]. In the verses it could be seen that he develops a deep distrust of a cultural context that has been around since time immemorial, but what does he trust? There is no way of knowing this in the work. This is due to the contradiction that naturally arises when he develops mistrustful ideas about what is behind him. More than anything else, this is a questioning of the intrinsic nature of one's own culture. But precisely they are also cultural traits that the poet cannot leave behind.

What it can be made clearly is that Li He is moving in the opposite direction from Blake, something that the rebel stands in the same direction as himself. One is the direct opinion of the poet, however, one is the conflict of the culture background. It is another major difference that is representative and typical. In others of contemporaries or in the same genre, it could be found that there are some subtle commonalities. For example, in the poems of the Lakeside School's Petrarch, Wordsworth, and others, readers could distill the thrust of their attempts to return to a natural way of life and to eschew profit-oriented and coldly urbanized development. From the poems of the Satanists, such as Byron and Keats, it could be felt the same obvious drive for a subjective perspective with the same kind of sense of falling short. From the works of many poets of the Tang Dynasty, such as Li Bai and Li Shangyin, it is enabled to analyze the existence of history and the special process by which rationality is integrated into poetry and even into the thoughts of the subjects. Similarly, this "distrust" may also find its source in some of these works. It is a direct questioning of the poet's identity.

5. Summary

In summary, some objective and well-supported similarities and differences between these two famous works have been clearly demonstrated. In terms of structural choices, Western Romantic poetry often prefers to establish transitional sentences or paragraphs to indicate the flow of emotions or abrupt shifts in attitude. However, such occurrences are rare in Chinese poetry of a similar nature, which tends to favor more direct expression and statements. Regarding imagery preferences, Chinese poetry with a Romantic style often outputs objective imagery with deep meanings, while Western Romantic poetry almost always employs imagery infused with the poet's subjective emotions and attitudes. In terms of core expression, Western Romantic poetry typically directly opposes opposing ideologies and reasoning. In contrast, Eastern poets, such as

Li He, often oppose elements behind themselves, such as cultural background and secular constraints. These three crucial differences are key features in the development of traditional poetry in the East and the West, and they are increasingly being recognized by researchers in current studies. In this paper, the author uses *The Tyger* and *Flying Light* as typical representatives.

It should also be acknowledged that this is not an isolated case. In their respective cultural developments, there are many other outstanding poets and representative works that have not been listed, but they also share similar similarities and differences that remain to be explored in the future.

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