

"Crazy Women" in Chinese and Foreign Literature: A Comparison of Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Fanyi in *Thunderstorm*

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Abstract. Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Fanyi in *Thunderstorm* are both female characters in literary works that have developed into being seen as "crazy" by others in the later stages. However, one work was created in Europe from the 16th to the 17th century, and the other in China from the 20th century. How can the similarities between these two female characters reflect the marginalization commonality of women in two different times and societies? What significance can the differences between these two roles inspire for the development of contemporary feminism? Driven by these objectives, this paper delves into two masterpieces in the literary treasure trove - Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Hamlet* and Cao Yu's modern play *Thunderstorm* and conducts a comparative study of gender roles that crosses time and space through a delicate analysis of their personalities and in-depth exploration of their experiences. At the level of "otherness", both female roles have the characteristic of lacking discourse power. However, from the perspective of her native personality, Ophelia is weaker and more passive, while Fanyi tends to be stronger and more active. Within different destinies, the two characters embarked on vastly different life trajectories. The two stories are like two prisms, reflecting the spectrum of women's survival status in the changing times. From obedience to struggle, the two characters outline an unfinished chapter about the awakening of feminism consciousness.

Keywords: Ophelia; Fanyi; Feminism; The Other.

1. Introduction

In the current era of globalization and informatization, the wheels of social development are rolling forward at an unprecedented speed. At the same time, the attention of all walks of life to the rights and interests of vulnerable groups is increasing, and women's issues have become one of the focuses of public opinion. Feminism, as a theory and social practice, is penetrating various fields with unprecedented strength, leading to a profound reflection on the traditional gender power structure. Literature, as a mirror of social reality, also carries the exploration of the reconstruction of women's status and identity without exception.

This article aims to respond to the call of this era by deeply analyzing the iconic female characters of Ophelia in the classic literary masterpiece *Hamlet* and Fanyi in the modern drama masterpiece *Thunderstorm*, showcasing a new interpretation from a feminist perspective. In the upcoming discussion, this paper will first apply "the Other" theory to explain the marginalization of two female characters in their respective texts, revealing how they are portrayed as "the other" in male-dominated narratives, and how this marginalization reflects the prevailing oppressive situation of women in society at that time. Furthermore, this paper will carefully compare the reactions and choices of Ophelia and Fanyi from the perspectives of personality and destiny. The image of Ophelia is often seen as a typical example of passively accepting fate's arrangements until mental breakdown, and behind her madness lies deep social oppression; Fanyi, on the other hand, takes a more resolute stance and actively resists the constraints imposed on her. Her rebellion is not only an awakening of personal will, but also a brave challenge to traditional gender roles. The above comparative analysis aims to reveal the common challenges and individual breakthroughs that women face in pursuing self-liberation and social status enhancement, despite the differences in historical and cultural contexts.

2. Similarities: "The Other" under the Gaze of Patriarchy

2.1. Starting from "The Other" Theory

The Other is a concept formed relative to the self, referring to all people and things beyond the self [1]. The Other is one of the key concepts in Western literary theory, with deep roots in Western philosophy and widely used in postmodern Western literary criticism.

The concept of The Other can be traced back to the origin of Western philosophy. Plato once mentioned the relationship between the same and the other in his *Dialogues*, believing that the positioning of the same depends on the existence of the other, and the differences of the other also indicate the existence of the same. In the 17th century, Descartes proposed the proposition of "I think, therefore I am", which separated the self from the external world and formed a binary opposition between the subject and the object. In the 20th century, more philosophers had novel insights into The Other. Existentialist philosopher Sartre believes that the gaze of the other promotes the shaping of an individual's self-image and is an important factor in the process of constructing the subject's self.

With the increasing emphasis on the paradoxical nature of the subject in academia, the overall tone of contemporary Western philosophy is shifting towards the study of the discourse of The Other. Lacan developed post-structuralist psychoanalysis by introducing linguistics ("the gestalt of the self is completed through observation and the mirror's gaze" [2]), and theorists such as Derrida and De Scheldo applied the concept of The Other to post-structuralism, enriching the multifaceted interpretation of the concept in modern philosophy.

In the postmodern cultural perspective, the concept of The Other has been reproduced and recreated in different literary criticism perspectives such as postcolonial criticism and ecological criticism, with the most typical being the application of The Other in feminist criticism. Beauvoir proposed, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." [3] The essence of the male gaze is an unequal power relationship, in which men occupy the dominant position of gaze to peep, discipline, and control women in the object and dominated position [4]. The traditional traits of women are not natural, but rather they are viewed as The Other and constructed by the society, culture, language, history, and power relationship dominated by the male subject. Feminists are committed to questioning and overturning the unequal relationship of the subject and the other between men and women, in order to change the marginalized status of women. In today's society, this criticism about The Other has even expanded to more unequal relationships of binary opposition. Feminists also pay attention to the situation of more socially disadvantaged groups such as ethnic and sexual minorities, supporting the struggle for self-expression and rights of these groups.

2.2. The Reflection of Otherness: The Lack of Discourse Power

Ophelia and Fanyi's otherness are reflected in the same dimension, specifically in their absence in the discourse power structure.

Ophelia's voice in the play is almost negligible, to the extent that she is extremely repressed in emotional expression. Ophelia's deep affection for Hamlet can only be expressed indirectly, such as through songs and flower languages, rather than through direct dialogue. Her direct language communication with Hamlet was based on a status gap, which was partly due to Hamlet's noble status as a prince. However, Ophelia's attitude towards him even approached the extreme obedience of servants to their masters. This extreme clearly created obstacles for equal communication between Ophelia and Hamlet. The fifth scene of Act 4 contains Ophelia's most direct and comprehensive emotional expression, but she still does not express it in her conversation with Hamlet. At that time, her situation was close to madness, and she sang these songs in front of the king and queen to extol lost love and death:

*"He is dead and gone lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone."*

*"Larded all with sweet fowers;
Which bewept to the grave did not go
With true-love showers." [5]*

These lyrics reflect her deep love for Hamlet and the pain she has suffered as a result of this relationship. Nevertheless, this deep emotional expression cannot be heard by Hamlet. In fact, it is only the author's relatively kind presentation to readers. In the play, the songs do not have any impact on Hamlet. Even the king and queen heard on the spot do not have significant psychological fluctuations. As a woman, Ophelia's discourse power for her own happiness is almost negligible in a court full of power struggles.

The arrangement of Fanyi in *Thunderstorm* is more typical of the lack of female discourse power. Fanyi was originally the housewife of the Zhou family, holding a traditional family status second only to the "head of the family" Zhou Puyuan. However, she had little speech in major family decisions. When Zhou Puyuan decided to send Zhou Chong abroad and arranged Zhou Ping's marriage, Fan Yi's opinions were not taken into consideration, even if these decisions would directly affect Fan Yi's life. Although Fanyi's heart was filled with flames of resistance, trying to break free from constraints (such as trying to retain Zhou Ping with all means, and even taking medication to control Zhou Chong), her resistance was more private and she could not openly challenge authority at the family meeting table. Zhou Puyuan always forcefully blocks Fanyi's expression with a cold attitude and uses any method to prohibit her thoughts from being known to others. He unreasonably suppressed and belittled Fanyi in his language, urging her to see a doctor in Act 2:

"You are shouting and making trouble in front of others, and you are sick, but you just avoid seeking medical treatment and refuse to call a doctor. Isn't this a neurological disorder?" [6]

However, Fanyi actually has no illness at all, but can only be forced to accept Zhou Puyuan's pressure to see a doctor and take bitter medicine. This is the reality that Chinese women find it difficult to directly voice their opposition in feudal families.

As the pure flower of the Danish royal family, Ophelia's fate is tightly bound by the shackles of patriarchy. Her fragility and obedience ultimately lead to a mental breakdown and tragic self-destruction. Yet Fanyi, located in the vortex of intense collision between feudal ethics and emerging ideas in China at the beginning of the 20th century, though displaying a more rebellious spirit and emotional struggles, cannot escape the cage woven by family and society. Both have encountered numerous obstacles in their pursuit of love and freedom, reflecting the oppression and limitations that women have faced throughout history. Their similarities reveal the common dilemma that transcends time - that women often occupy the passive and dominant position of The Other in social structure and power relations.

3. Contrasts: Ophelia is Passively Crazy, While Fanyi is Actively Rebellious

3.1. Personality Traits

As a representative of aristocratic girls, Ophelia grew up obediently following her father's teaching from a young age, like a flower in a greenhouse being nurtured in all directions. Her brother Leotis also took care of his sister wholeheartedly from his own perspective. When Ophelia had a normal relationship with Hamlet, both her father and brother were worried about the gap in their status and doubted Hamlet's change of heart. Therefore, both of them tried their best to persuade and even force

Ophelia to keep a distance from Hamlet. However, it was the excessive indulgence and protection that made Ophelia lose her ability to think independently and make initiative choices. She almost became a doll without active thinking. Her brother asked her to stay away from Hamlet, so she stayed away. Her father said the love was all deception, so she believed it was all deception. Under the shaped mindset, Ophelia can only follow the path pointed out by others. However, she also had an uncontrollable admiration for Hamlet in her heart. Because her willpower was not strong enough, she could only struggle between being a good girl and bravely pursuing love. She struggled in pain between love and hatred, unable to boldly break free from constraints and become an independent self [7]. Later, when Hamlet pretended to be crazy and cursed Ophelia rudely, Ophelia felt immense grief. Her personality has always been passive and weak, and she tends to think more from the perspective of others with empathy.

Fanyi's personality set the overall tone in her first appearance in the play:

"There is an uncontrollable 'brute force' in her personality that allows her to make reckless decisions. She loves people as passionately as a fire, and hates them as passionately as a fire, burning them down." "She will love you like a dog that has been hungry for three days biting its favorite bone, and she will hate you like a vicious dog growling, no, silently, swallowing you." [6]

This clearly reveals the underlying causes of Fanyi's unique personality traits and her revenge and love [8]. Firstly, in order to live in a society where women can hardly stand, she had to accept the "pent-up fire" in her heart, that is, the deceived youth by Zhou Puyuan since the age of seventeen. However, this fire often burns in her eyes and heart, "showing that a controlled woman is controlling herself". On the one hand, Fanyi is subjected to inhumane oppression and torment spiritually, and on the other hand, she has to endure bowing her head in order to survive. This is like a spring that has been bent for a long time. Once it is released under certain circumstances, it will exert an extremely terrifying force on the things that oppress it.

3.2. Destinies

Ophelia's madness was not achieved overnight, but rather the result of multiple pressures and unfortunate events accumulating. As a young woman, she encountered betrayal and rejection in love. After experiencing family upheavals, Hamlet's attitude towards Ophelia changed significantly. Good words and eloquence have faded like a puff of smoke, replaced by harsh accusations and baseless slanders. When Ophelia was entrusted by the king and queen to test the reason for Hamlet's madness, Hamlet cursed, *"God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp; you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness, your ignorance."* [5] He vented the complete contempt and denial of women caused by his mother's infidelity on Ophelia without exception, using various methods to engage in outspoken slut humiliation [9]. This attitude of sudden hot and cold is undoubtedly the most thorough shattering of the inherent psychological defense of chastity and integrity of an aristocratic lady, and also the most profound depreciation of women by patriarchal oppression.

However, the final series of family deaths was the bullet that shattered Ophelia's last line of defense. Firstly, her father Polonius was mistakenly killed by Hamlet, followed by her brother Leotis planning revenge but ultimately lost his life in a duel with Hamlet. Ophelia lost her two closest relatives in a short period of time, and these consecutive losses dealt a fatal blow to her mental state. Hence in the seventh scene of Act 4, through the queen's narration, the audience learns that Ophelia accidentally fell into the river and drowned while picking flowers. Although Shakespeare did not explicitly state whether she had chosen to throw herself into the water, Ophelia's death was enough to symbolize the complete collapse of her inner world and the complete abandonment of reality.

In a male-dominated world, Ophelia is both a pawn in a love game and a prey for family interests. Faced with the successive blows, she lacks sufficient psychological preparation and coping mechanisms, leading to a passive mental breakdown and ultimately immersing herself in the water to

end her life. Her experience revealed the inevitability of individual mental defense collapsing under extreme pressure and emotional setbacks, which is not only a reflection of personal tragedy, but also a profound exposure to the oppression and neglect of women in society at that time.

Fanyi's rebellion is reflected in her brave pursuit of love, direct resistance to authority, and various attempts to seek survival and self-assertion in desperate situations. Although her behavior is to some extent forced by the environment, it also demonstrates her awakening and resistance as an individual, which is a powerful subversion of the female roles of the old era. She is a "determined personality liberator" [10]. Since being deceived into marrying into the Zhou Mansion at the age of seventeen, Fanyi has lived with the tyrannical and ruthless Zhou Puyuan for 18 years and has since been firmly trapped in the feudal family's cage. A marriage without love and purely for the sake of profit is like a dry well that draws people's energy. Coupled with Zhou Puyuan's almost abnormal desire for control under patriarchy, Fanyi "cannot breathe a breath of free air" and has almost become a dead person. Women who are weak, boneless, and submissive will lose themselves in such a situation, lost in the "stagnant heat" of the Zhou Mansion. Nevertheless, the strength and madness in Fanyi's bones enabled her to successfully find a special way of life - she seized the straw of her stepson Zhou Ping. When she was faced with Zhou Ping's confession of fervent love, she almost fell in love with him in a twisted and blind way. Afterwards, she disregarded her reputation, status, and even her life and fell into Zhou Ping's embrace as a stepmother, willing to compromise and have an affair with Zhou Ping in a haunted manner. Although this kind of emotion is despised in traditional morality, Fanyi's way out like Zhou Ping of that era to avoid a complete mental breakdown could not be permanently labeled as disregarding human ethics. This is the shackles worn by women in traditional patriarchal societies - if you want to break free from the pain of a marriage (or relationship), you can only switch to another marriage (or relationship), and there is no other way out.

Fanyi's rebellious traits, as strong as thunder, are also reflected in her discovery of the private affair between Zhou Ping and Sifeng. Similar to most women, when she first discovered Zhou Ping's abandonment, Fanyi first focused on saving her relationship and tried every possible way to salvage her situation. She even made concessions and was willing to leave with Zhou Ping and Sifeng. Yet until the end, when the situation was irreparable, Fanyi turned her target to the crazy obstruction of destroying if she could not get it. The most surprising method was to forcefully push her biological son into the emotional vortex between Zhou Ping and Sifeng, using Zhou Chong's feelings for Sifeng to try to make the brothers turn against each other. However, Zhou Chong was more considerate of Sifeng and did not become as angry as his mother had hoped, but voluntarily withdrew. For the departure of her life-saving straw Zhou Ping, Fanyi has already forgotten her identity as a mother and is only willing to harm her own flesh and blood in order to achieve her rebellious goal. This is a strong and almost abnormal personality, thundering like thunder. The wild vitality hidden in the bottom layer of her heart is the driving force behind Fanyi's awakening and resistance in the Zhou Mansion, actively fighting for a certain degree of freedom in her life.

Although writers in the past were inevitably deeply influenced by patriarchal discourse in their ideological concepts and often vilified and belittled the image of "crazy women", the fundamental law in literature is that images outweigh thoughts. These initial images of "crazy women" have increasingly demonstrated their value with the development of the time [11]. By comparing their vastly different personality traits and destinies, readers can also glimpse the awakening of female subjectivity and changes in resistance strategies with the evolution of the times. Compared to Ophelia, Fanyi has a more distinct personality and more proactive resistance. Although she has not completely shed the tragic color, it also reflects the subtle improvement of women's status and autonomy consciousness in the past three hundred years. Imagine that women in the 16th century in Europe were still completely male appendages, without independent property rights and unable to receive education. In the 20th century, under the influence of the New Culture Movement, Chinese women had at least the opportunity to receive modern education and could also step out of their families and participate in social work. The differences in literary works have become an important benchmark

for measuring the development of feminism, demonstrating the process of women gradually moving from silence and obedience to self-expression and striving for rights.

4. Conclusion

The stereotypical image of "crazy woman" in literary works gradually reveals its unique value and cultural significance in the changing times, becoming a valuable mirror reflecting social changes, gender issues, and psychological depth. Ophelia's drowning in the lake was not only the pinnacle of her personal tragedy, but also a strong metaphor for the suppression of women's emotions and autonomous will in society at that time; Fanyi, on the other hand, portrays the unique resistance of traditional women under the dual constraints of family and society through her almost uncontrollable hysteria. The depth and breadth of these images go beyond the negative labels initially attached to them, becoming indispensable cultural symbols for exploring feminist issues and criticizing traditional gender order.

By using Hamlet and Thunderstorm as mirrors, scholars can not only gain insight into the changes in women's living conditions in the historical context, but also deeply observe the development trend of contemporary feminism. Currently, feminism continues to expand globally, and a group of feminists are vigorously advocating for gender equality, challenging traditional gender role stereotypes, and even promoting legal and social system reforms. These efforts are a positive response and transcendence to the tragic fate of countless women in history. Through the above analysis, people can better understand the past and current situation of feminism, and then look forward to a more inclusive and equal future.

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