

"Wu Lu Conceals the Hibiscus, Lotus is Not Clearly Visible"

-- On the Tragic Aesthetic Characteristics of Pan Xiangli's Novel "Piercing Heart Lotus"

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Abstract: In the diverse literary landscape of the new era, Pan Xiangli, as a unique landscape in "female writing," her novels prevail in contemporary literary circles with the theme of "sorrow without harm, reaching the pinnacle of emotion and beauty." She has a profound classical literary background, combined with rich urban life experiences, embodying both modernity and tradition, which holds special significance in female writing. Her unique family background, urban experiences, and aesthetic pursuits make her novel creation exhibit the characteristics of romantic and sentimental literature in terms of material selection, lyricism, and techniques, carrying a hazy and profound tragic meaning. "Piercing Heart Lotus," as Pan Xiangli's first epic tragic work, showcases the tragic aesthetic characteristics of her novels through the tragic writing of "self-awareness of warmth and cold," the tragic style of "interweaving tragedy and beauty," and the tragic mood imbued with compassion in poeticism.

Keywords: Pan Xiangli; Tragic Aesthetic Characteristics; Piercing Heart Lotus.

1. Introduction

Pan Xiangli is a contemporary renowned urban female writer. In the noisy literary world, she stands out from avant-garde and indulgent beauty writers, as well as from alternative female writers with edgy qualities. What she has always pursued and adhered to is a gentle and fresh writing style. Her works are lightly warm and calmly clear, as scholar Liu Minyan once said: "With her fresh and pure writing style, Pan Xiangli integrates fashion elements and classical qualities, forming a distinctive artistic style that attracts the attention of many readers and literary critics." However, fundamentally, whether facing real life or dealing with writing, Pan Xiangli may be a clear-eyed pessimist, especially evident in her novel "Piercing Heart Lotus." "Piercing Heart Lotus" is an urban romance novel with a female writer named Deep Blue as the protagonist. While it superficially narrates a common extramarital affair story, it actually portrays the lost love and search for love, pain and redemption of urban women with a unique conception, showcasing the author's unique tragic aesthetic perspective to the fullest.

Currently, academic research on Pan Xiangli's novels mainly focuses on the analysis of story plots, exploration of artistic forms, and investigation of female consciousness, with few scholars delving into the tragic aesthetic characteristics in her novels. "Piercing Heart Lotus," as Pan Xiangli's epic tragic work, is a perfect embodiment of her tragic art. The author attempts to use this novel as an example, employing close reading of the text as the basic method, to explore the tragic aesthetic characteristics of Pan Xiangli's novel creation from the aspects of tragic writing, tragic style, and the creation of tragic mood, aiming to enrich the existing research content on Pan Xiangli's novels.

2. The Tragic Writing of "Knowing Cold and Warmth"

Different from the intense and thrilling writing style of

traditional Greek tragedies, Pan Xiangli does not insist on intensifying story conflicts or exacerbating the despair and pain of the plot in her creations. Instead, she is accustomed to enduring and restraining with a transcendent and rational attitude, refraining from wailing or excessive sentimentality, resembling the Confucian doctrine of moderation. In her work "Fragile Creation and Difficult Aesthetics," she openly expresses the connection between "writing and tragedy," stating, "How fragile, how powerless, how laughable writing is in the face of many human tragedies!" For the complex and tumultuous world, writing may seem insignificant, yet Pan Xiangli persists because in this ever-changing era, she remains steadfast in her calm and composed sincerity. Confronted with scenes of sorrowful tragedies, in order to leave room for the characters in her work, she chooses to depict ideals and despair by downplaying conflicts. Even when some are deeply trapped in the hardships of reality, they can still maintain composure or only reveal a hint of sorrow, engaging in introspection and psychological redemption in a silent, introspective manner, akin to "drinking blood as if it were water, knowing cold and warmth."

2.1. Silent Character Reflection

The section headings are in boldface capital and lowercase letters. Second level headings are typed as part of the succeeding paragraph (like the subsection heading of this paragraph). All manuscripts must be in English, also the table and figure texts, otherwise we cannot publish your paper. Please keep a second copy of your manuscript in your office. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use the paper for the book or journal in question. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use the paper for the book or journal in question. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use. "Self-reflection," as the name suggests, refers to self-examination, a process in psychology that involves examining one's own words and actions through

self-awareness, encompassing self-assessment, self-reflection, self-control, and self-education. "Character reflection" can be seen as the manifestation of individual self-awareness and agency, serving as an effective way of cultivating virtue. If self-reflection is considered a skill, then Pan Xiangli and the characters in her works possess an innate talent for it. Pan Xiangli believes that a good tragic work is not merely an emotional outburst but should involve rational thinking. Only by transcending the pain of tragedy and engaging in silent self-reflection and empathy can a deeper level of tragic art be revealed. This "self-reflection and empathy" is prominently displayed in the choice of narrative perspective in her works. In the story "Piercing Heart Lotus," Pan Xiangli uses the first-person narrative of the female protagonist "Deep Blue," depicting Deep Blue silently engaging in character reflection and expressing life insights. For example, in the chapter "Poison," Deep Blue clearly realizes that the influence of parents on their children is like a slow-acting poison, gradually exerting its effects along the journey of life, with no antidote to be found, and any remedy only exacerbating its toxicity. She also attempts to break free from the shackles of this poison through love but ends up disappointed:

"This is my second antidote, but the poison on my body has become more severe. I found... I was just escaping, desperately avoiding him and the invisible pressure that pursued me like a relentless chase."

Facing the immense shadow cast on her life by the tragic love story of her parents, Deep Blue continually reflects and seeks self-healing in silence. However, she ultimately succumbs to a heartbreaking fate of emotional death due to love, concluding that the only way to liberation is to give up on love.

"I don't want to love anymore. I don't want to endure that pain and sorrow, the deepest doubts about human nature brought about by the changes in the person I love the most, the collapse and fall, loneliness and despair, can never be healed."

The author consistently recalls the sad love story through the voice of "I," but as the protagonist "I," she not only experiences the pain firsthand but also maintains a sense of detachment, rationality, and composure. Deep Blue positions herself as both a confessor and a listener, weaving through history and reality with her thoughts, inadvertently diluting the bitterness and embarrassment of memories. As she reflects and contemplates, the profound sorrow and desolation from the depths of her heart gradually take shape in front of the readers, transforming into a profound and heavy pain. This calm and heavy sadness is not only a skillful embodiment of Pan Xiangli's tragic narrative technique but also demonstrates her consistent wisdom and composure. Some scholars may speculate that Pan Xiangli's rational creation lacks emotional intensity, but in reality, she conceals profound emotions beneath the calm and sorrowful surface, undergoing the sedimentation of thoughts and refinement of reason, ultimately leading to an impassioned outpouring in her works, emitting a warm anguish and sorrow.

2.2. Introspective Psychological Redemption

The expression of contemporary urban literature is diverse and complex. Theoretically, it can be categorized into two main approaches: external exploration and introspection. "External exploration" refers to writers striving to showcase the vibrant external world, emphasizing the connection

between characters and society as a whole. On the other hand, "introspection" refers to writers focusing entirely on personal life, especially on individual character traits, with a strong subjective narrative tendency. Renowned writer Lu Taosheng once confessed that his novels are like endoscopic explorations, delving into introspective storytelling to cleanse the soul through self-reflection. Pan Xiangli's novel creations also share this characteristic. Her introspective narratives focus on probing and examining the internal aspects of things or individual characters, aiming to better present the unique life insights of the characters in the story. In the novel "Piercing Heart Lotus," which serves as a typical introspective work, the spotlight is on the female protagonist, Deep Blue. Due to her unique identity as a writer, Deep Blue is mostly isolated from the outside world, as indicated in the original text:

"Breakfast and supper, this is not just a difference in naming, but reveals two completely different ways of life: those who have had breakfast are bustling off to work, while I, after a brief contact with the crowd, immediately return to my own nest, entering my ignorant and peaceful time."

"Desire retreats, the whole of Shanghai is just a desert to me."

This nocturnal lifestyle and solitary living make Deep Blue mostly alone. She even views Shanghai, a bustling place, as a desert of depleted desires, highlighting the dullness and grayness of her daily life, subtly conveying a sense of triviality and sadness in urban life to the readers. Compared to the simple and sincere customs and human relationships in rural society, urban life tends to emphasize rigid regulations. In the interplay between human emotions and rules, the gloominess of the characters' lives portrayed by the author is undoubtedly well-founded. The healing process for an individual is long and arduous. When Deep Blue encounters confusion, setbacks, heart flutters, or heartaches, she can only confide in herself. She knows that in this era filled with chaotic love affairs, for pessimistic idealists, love is reduced to elusive recitations and poetic reveries reminiscent of ancient times. Regarding the tragic love story with Qixuanqing, Deep Blue increasingly sees psychological redemption as the only lifeline, for example:

"Many emotions in life are like heartless lotus seeds. You can nurture them well, but you cannot expect them to sprout."

"Every day, I silently discipline myself like this. I need to do this to prevent myself from falling into complete confusion and self-isolation."

Through Deep Blue's inner monologue in the text, it is evident that Pan Xiangli uses a cruel and realistic pen to analyze love relationships and human nature. The lotus seeds in the story may represent illicit love affairs, reunions with old friends, or encounters with strangers, unexpectedly awakening modern individuals who have been numbed by rational order to their emotions. The novel cleverly avoids the endless entanglement of moral propositions, delving into the understanding and revelation of the modern human mentality, with Deep Blue undoubtedly representing such modern individuals. However, no matter how rational the analysis may be, it does not hinder Pan Xiangli's expression of tragic emotions. What readers consistently feel from her works is a sense of helplessness and desolation in life, a strong and solemn tragic undertone.

3. The Tragic Style of "Interwoven Beauty and Sorrow"

As a female writer born into a literary family, Pan Xiangli steadfastly continues the lingering charm of the New Woman School, persisting in narrating the daily lives of urban women with a heart full of compassion. She hopes to bring readers a touch of warmth and emotion in her calm and serene narratives. In her novel creations, she possesses a unique tragic aesthetic inclination, with stories where beauty and sorrow are interwoven. Apart from achieving the tragic and mournful aspect, beauty is also an indispensable element, with the two closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The core content of this "interwoven beauty and sorrow" style directly addresses the beauty and sorrow of urban women. It reflects Pan Xiangli's interpretation of life and love based on her aesthetic tastes, shaping female characters, personalities, or destinies that embody both beauty and sorrow. "Pan Xiangli's pursuit in her novels is to reveal the soulful tremors of each character in a highly individualized space." The tragic characters in her works are restrained yet noble, not only adhering to the emotional rules of "mourning without harm" but also upholding the classical sentiment of "utmost beauty and love," skillfully conveying the purifying effect of tragedy.

3.1. Adhering to the Emotional Rule of "Mourning Without Harm"

The term "mourning without harm" means to experience sorrow without causing harm to oneself physically or mentally. It now metaphorically refers to moderate behavior, with restraint and moderation, without excess or deficiency. The characters in Pan Xiangli's novels are accustomed to upholding this principle of moderate sorrow. The tension in her character development lies in her ability to express emotions and depict psychology with moderation and restraint. Her works always reveal a wisdom and openness of understanding human affairs and emotions. In her writing, what should be depicted with vivid sorrow is narrated in a subtle, restrained, and melancholic manner, devoid of wailing or sobbing, without any sentimentality or crying. Only a faint trace of sorrow subtly lingers in the readers' thoughts. Just like Deep Blue in "Lotus Heart," she is a self-disciplined, intelligent, non-lustful, and self-sufficient urban woman. Women of this kind in literary works often possess the resilience and ability for self-redemption. The male protagonist, Qi Xuanqing, is elegant, gentlemanly, intellectual, and well-educated, resembling a high-quality man from classic old movies. After successfully completing their first collaborative publication, a deep understanding and mutual appreciation between them lead to the blossoming of affection. However, Deep Blue always reminds herself to adhere to the principle and boundary of never intruding into someone else's family:

"For so many years, even if I am down and lonely, I have never had any involvement with married men. This has nothing to do with morals. For love, I can put my pride in my pocket, but I cannot trample on it."

She strives to restrain herself, avoiding inadvertently falling into the abyss of love, and diverts her worries by "escaping into novels." However, love unknowingly arises and deepens. The more restrained Deep Blue is, the more she is tormented by the repercussions of love. Ultimately, extramarital affairs are essentially a deeply memorable love tragedy. When the two, plagued by longing, finally muster the

courage to face this sincere and challenging emotion, fate takes a sudden turn—the current wife of Qi Xuanqing, Qi Xiaoyu, jumps to her death by suicide. This tragic event directly triggers a series of subsequent tragedies, such as the family tragedy of Qi Xiaoyu, the love tragedy of Qi Xuanqing and Deep Blue, and the tragic fates of everyone involved in this event. The relentless mockery of life, unexpected and unprepared-for events, along with deep-seated feelings of guilt, leave Qi Xuanqing unable to face reality and disappear from the world, leaving Deep Blue alone to bear all the pain. Faced with Qi Xuanqing's choice, Deep Blue experiences hesitation, shouts, and moments of passive despair, but never gives up on herself or life due to the unfortunate love. Instead, she confronts the pain with a brave and resolute attitude, saying:

"The wound that never heals, if you carefully avoid touching it for years, it will persistently ache. It's better to sprinkle some salt, rub it randomly, let it hurt, and then it will be fine."

What was thought to be a perfect match, with souls resonating and a love story of kindred spirits, takes a sharp turn as Pan Xiangli's narrative wisdom and strategy make readers shudder. This text of "Lotus Heart" vividly portrays the distorted expressions of modern human spirit and love, with Deep Blue's behavior of "mourning without harm" directly deepening the tragic implications of the work. Pan Xiangli's clear and ruthless perception lies in the fact that, despite longing thoughts, the reality of reason always exists within rational reality. The tragedy of this era lies in the fact that true warmth often builds upon pure rationality. Only the most cold-blooded individuals can maintain a kind of warmth devoid of love between men and women, as seen in the relationship between Deep Blue and Dou Sha.

"Sometimes, we are almost like lovers, but we are so good precisely because we are not lovers. This kind of goodness, at our age, is the best kind of relationship between a man and a woman... But this warmth is actually the kind that only the most cold-blooded people can maintain."

The pure love pursued by Deep Blue and Qi Xuanqing, though lofty and beautiful, is extremely difficult and almost impossible to achieve in reality, foretelling a tragic ending. Just as Mr. Zhu Guangqian believed, "Great tragedies unintentionally produce moral effects." Qi Xuanqing's personality and moral consciousness hinder his connection with pure love, as does Deep Blue. When human nature and true feelings clash, the latter is always negligible. However, by strictly adhering to the emotional rule of "mourning without harm," perhaps much heartache can be avoided. Throughout the entire book, the calmly narrated sorrow, upon reflection, reveals a chilling beauty of legend. Both sorrowful and beautiful, this may be the greatness of Pan Xiangli.

3.2. Adhering to the classical sentiment of "utmost love and beauty."

In her novels, Pan Xiangli often portrays the lives of modern urban people while preserving a sense of classical sentiment amidst the hustle and bustle of society. Her characters are not depicted as wicked or heartless individuals, but rather as embodiments of truth, goodness, and deep emotions. They distance themselves from the materialistic and hectic nature of modern society, maintaining a romantic, idealistic outlook despite the pressures of societal norms. This inclination towards classical values is a result of Pan Xiangli's deep immersion in and influence by classical literature,

creating a literary world rich in classical atmosphere and showcasing a distinct modern spirit.

The characters of Shen Lan and Qi Xuanqing in "Heart-Piercing Lotus" embody this blend of classical atmosphere and modern character traits. Despite Qi Xuanqing's betrayal of Shen Lan's deep love due to his unshakable sense of responsibility, he remains a steadfast, composed, and loyal man. He possesses the rationality and clarity of a modern man while retaining the stubbornness and conservatism of traditional masculinity. Even though the emotional bond between husband and wife has long faded, his commitment to putting responsibility first and selflessly dedicating himself to the family for decades shines brightly in today's diverse society. Pan Xiangli's brilliance lies in evoking a sense of joy and solace amidst the reader's despair, showcasing a unique melancholic power in her writing.

"As a self-proclaimed pessimist, Pan Xiangli believes in the insignificance of human efforts in the vastness of time and space, unable to alter the course of history or change the final outcome."

She skillfully uses a narrative tone of "knowing there are tigers in the mountains yet still heading towards them" to depict Shen Lan's self-redemption. In a deeper sense, Shen Lan's unwavering dedication to her identity as a writer is a reflection of her classical literary upbringing. Scholar Guo Yan aptly summarizes that "Heart-Piercing Lotus" not only captures contemporary urban cultural experiences but also reveals encounters between the classical and the modern, reflecting women's feelings towards love and freedom and showcasing the calm and enduring self-redemption of women in the changing times.

Furthermore, upon closer examination of Pan Xiangli's works, one can observe her pursuit of a classical aesthetic style that resonates with the intrinsic beauty of classical Chinese tragic love. Both emphasize the "utmost beauty in love" tragic spirit. For instance, in the ending of "Heart-Piercing Lotus," when Shen Lan encounters the familiar yet unfamiliar Qi Xuanqing after a long time, her heart races intensely at the reunion with her old love, yet she calmly views it as a mirage, silently observing without taking any action. This ending, where Shen Lan actively chooses her love outcome after successful self-redemption, not only implies the author's ideal view of love, characterized by unwavering dedication to pure love without impurities or calculations but also alludes to the independent love and worldview of urban women.

Pan Xiangli's portrayal of the relationship between Shen Lan and Qi Xuanqing exhibits a restrained yet profoundly beautiful aesthetic style, evoking a range of emotions in readers from compassion to shock, from lamentation to heart-wrenching astonishment, perhaps showcasing the tragic effect and power of literature.

4. The Tragic Poetic Atmosphere Infused with Compassion

Shen Congwen once said, "Any form of art can embody the sentiment of poetry." Pan Xiangli, with her background of growing up in a literary family and possessing an elegant and gentle temperament, fully agrees with this view. Therefore, in her choice of subjects, she deliberately avoids grand mainstream narratives, focusing instead on the ordinary aspects of daily life and blending clear and beautiful narrative language with subtle and profound textual imagery, infusing

her works with a poetic charm and atmosphere. Upon close examination of Pan Xiangli's novels such as "I Love Xiaowanzi," "White Water Green Vegetables," and "Heart-Piercing Lotus," it is not difficult to notice that her writing flows with delicacy and gentleness, elegance and agility. The smooth and relaxed pace of her novels, coupled with the ease of expansion and contraction, may be the source of the poetic quality in her works. However, within this poetic narration lies a slow-flowing sadness, with each line filled with deep compassion. In short, Pan Xiangli's novels exude a beautiful poetic atmosphere, yet beneath this poetic veil lies a calm and poignant tragic consciousness. The author's brilliance lies in using this sense of inevitable desolation and tragedy, employing artistic and nimble ways to present it in the text through the control of rhythm and emotions, ultimately creating a tragic poetic atmosphere imbued with a poetic charm that touches the soul and moves the heart.

"Just as Chen Yingsong is immersed in 'Shennongjia' and Jia Pingwa is fond of 'Shangzhou,' Pan Xiangli, with her literary wisdom, explores the city - this piece of familiar cultural soil and the emotional secrets hidden in the spiritual realm." Shanghai, a city known for its high tolerance, has shaped Pan Xiangli and all the dynamic characters in her works. She infuses her personal insights into the lines of her works, pondering the human emotions and human nature issues of the urban world with a sense of compassion and empathy. The resulting works resemble a setting sun, carrying a heavy sadness yet exuding a picturesque poetic landscape.

"Heart-Piercing Lotus" depicts urban women seeking and losing love in their daily lives. The creation of textual imagery and the selection of symbols in Pan Xiangli's novels bring out the gentle and poetic qualities, as well as the melancholy yet not heavy, romantic yet not overly sentimental, restrained yet introspective pursuit of classical aesthetics to the utmost. Particularly noteworthy is the author's depiction and rendering of the story scenes, using clear and beautiful language to portray numerous poetic and poignant scenes, such as the description of the spring scene at the beginning of the article:

"The light, the humidity, the faint brightness and the vast melancholy have a ready-made name, called 'spring overcast.' Originally such a mundane 'spring,' with the addition of the word 'overcast,' suddenly changed its appearance, possessing seven parts of elegance and three parts of a temperament that invites speculation.

This free and bright yet shrouded in vast melancholy spring scene can be described as the best portrayal of Pan Xiangli's poetic tragedy. It is half flourishing and half declining, implicit and gentle, pursuing the balance between effortless charm and relaxation.

For example, in the chapter "Water and Sea City," the description of the scene of pear blossoms in full bloom:

"They bloomed so beautifully, as if bright moonlight shone on thin silver, yet the flowers were in full bloom, crowded all over the sky and ground, reflecting each other more brightly. Looking up, the flower heads covered overhead, and the whole person seemed to have fallen into a dream."

A woman with a newly opened heart and a bright pear blossom blooming under the warm sun meet face to face in this wonderful imaginary scene at the transition of spring and summer. Pan Xiangli connects the profound soul with the fresh scene, with the blooming pear blossoms symbolizing her longing for Qixuanqing and the beautiful memories of the past, also revealing a sense of regret and pity for the passing

of youthful years. The subtle and bright colors contrast strongly with the desolate and dark love, the poetic scene quietly flowing with a sense of compassion, truly embodying the idea of 'the scene has its end, but the meaning is endless.'

Li Ze's book "The Journey of Beauty" mentions that an image is "a physical object that conveys the writer's thoughts, emotions, and thematic ideas through purely objective description." Proficient in writing imagery, Pan Xiangli skillfully sets multiple implicit and metaphorical images in "Heart-Piercing Lotus" to narrate emotions and to allegorize the tragic fate of women in the work, thereby extending the depth and breadth of the text. "Heart-Piercing Lotus," as one of the most typical images in the text, alludes to the novel not being a pure love story, but a spiritual history of female self-redemption. The author interprets it as a lotus seed that can be preserved but cannot sprout, actually metaphorizing the difficult journey of self-spiritual transcendence for the spiritually dead in the urban love watch—love without power and love without traces.

"Many emotions in life, like a lotus seed without a heart, you can always keep it well, but you cannot expect it to really sprout. But now, the heart-piercing lotus has burst out jade-like leaves, and they rapidly unfold, standing tall and elegant."

The entire novel is completed in the narrative of Deep Blue enduring the pain of heart-piercing. While the author uses a dreamlike pen to make the heart-piercing lotus burst out jade-green leaves and draw out a beautiful lotus flower from the teacup, the brief joy is immediately overshadowed by a sudden accident. The image of the heart-piercing lotus has long foretold the tragic ending of Deep Blue's quest for love and the tragic fate of self-redemption she needs. In each poetic tragic atmosphere, what moves readers in Pan Xiangli's works is that in an era where profit reigns supreme, she allows the spiritually dead to continue to believe in love, even if hurt again, they can resiliently uncover their scars, self-heal, and be reborn from the ashes. Pan Xiangli's works are filled with strong and compassionate independent women, who, even in the face of a tragic life, can still successfully redeem themselves."

5. Conclusion

In all of Pan Xiangli's novels, whether it is the subversion of traditional tragic expression or the poetic interpretation of aesthetic imagery, there lies a profound understanding of major issues related to human nature, human emotions, and human life, along with the transmission of values. As a urban woman and writer, she does not conform to societal norms, always interpreting daily life and love based on her own aesthetic standards, exploring the living space of contemporary women.

In the novel "Heart-Piercing Lotus," a poignant and tragic long story, Pan Xiangli, with a unique perspective and gentle touch, unfolds a dreamlike poetic tragedy for readers. She combines harsh reality with delicate tenderness, striving to reflect the unique life insights of individuals through her work, transcending sorrow and portraying a clear expression after

experiencing vicissitudes.

Overall, while Pan Xiangli's tragic writing may not be as heavy as Greek tragedies, it is equally moving, powerful, and thought-provoking. The narrative language of "fresh and elegant," the narrative attitude of "warmth and reason," the self-redemption through "silent introspection," and the narrative sentiment of "sorrow without injury" and "utmost love and beauty" not only guide contemporary women in life direction but also inject new vitality into the development of contemporary urban literature, fully reflecting the artistic value of her works.

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