



A Study on the Love in Romeo and Juliet from the Perspective of Christianity

Zhe Guan

Pu'er Institute of Socialism, Pu'er 665000, Yunnan, China

Abstract: Based on the case study of Romeo and Juliet, this paper mainly analyses the Christian influence on Shakespeare's works. In order to demonstrate the function of Christian culture in Shakespeare's works, the author chooses Juliet and Romeo as the research text to analyze the Christian elements that affect the love between Romeo and Juliet.

Key words: William Shakespeare; Romeo, Juliet; Christianity; love

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***Corresponding author:** Zhe Guan, 1870498668@qq.com

1 Introduction

Romeo and Juliet is Shakespeare's earliest great success in tragedy. The play exposes the old feudal world with its internal strife and the two innocent lovers die because of the long-lasting hatred between the two families. This play has always remained a favorite with young readers and audience, but they ignore the elements of religion, especially Christianity. Christian culture through the whole western history is almost equivalent with the western culture. It has a significant impact on the literature and guides the course of literature in some aspects.

According to *The New Psychology of Love* by Robert J. Sternberg, love consists of three factors, which are intimacy, passion and commitment^[1]. Intimacy is the feeling to combine one boy with one girl in love. It has a lot of factions, for example, Intimacy could improve the lover's desire and the two lovers can feel happy

when they stay with each other. For another example, the emotion of intimacy could help one to accept the support from another in love and they can communicate with each other in a good atmosphere. Second, passion is the important part of love. It is the driving force, which may cause one person's attention on the lover's body, perfect sex and other phenomenon in the relationships of love. In other words, passion is the wake source which can cause the experience of passion in love. It can let one person be eager to stay with his or her lover. In the relationships of love, the need for sex is the main form to cause the experience of passion. Third, commitment is another important part of love. We can understand it from two views. On the one hand, it means a decision-----"I love you"----- was made by one for another. On the other hand, it means a commitment that it can keep the relationship between two lovers was made. According to the theory of Love Triangle, the author finds that the love in Romeo and Juliet belongs to Romantic Love. There are three factors in love. They are intimacy, passion and commitment. And its main characteristic is that there is little commitment and more intimacy as well as more passion in their love.

2 Literature Review

Religion is one social consciousness which refers to over the world and over the nature force; and it is also the actions that the believers express their belief and worship; and it is the sociocultural system to synthesize this consciousness and actions which are normalized and institutionalized^[2]. Religion has four factors: religious idea, religious experience, religious action, and religious system. And they can also be divided into two groups. One refers to the internal factors of religion

including religious idea and experience, the other refers to the external factors of religion including religious action and system.

As everyone knows, Christianity is one of the three major religions in the world. According to *Essentials of Religious Studies* by LvDaji, Christianity is also a kind of sociocultural system, which reflects religious four factors. So, it can be divided into two aspects too. One refers to the internal factors of Christianity including Christian idea and experience, the other refers to the external factors of Christianity including Christian action and system. Both the internal and the external factors of Christianity appeared in *Romeo and Juliet*. They are mainly Christian love and Christian marriage.

According to *Christian Marriage and Love* by Cen Zhu, love was explained as God in the Bible^[3]. That means all of the love comes from God. People must regard god as the original of true love. The real meaning of love means sacrifice and contribution. It can also be understand talking friendly, giving, attracting between soul and body. The lovers should be happy to explore all about his or her. The lovers exchange his or her opinion when they get into puppy love so that they can have the same value.

According to *The Christian Philosophy of Marriage*, the author finds the illustration about Christian institution and marriage^[4]. First, church was built up because of marriage. Marriage was appeared before society and religious authority. And marriage was built in heaven in the early time, which was built by God himself. Second, marriage is formed by the two lovers, which was described as “consensus facit nuptias”. Third, there are two forms of marriage: secular marriage or religious marriage, which will be chosen by the man and wife in the future. The two lovers have the autonomy to choose marriage. While the forms, secular marriage or religious marriage, are insignificant to the validity of marriage. That thought also reflect on this matter that the man and his wife will get their holy status from god in the wedding. For instance, the word “dominus” and “domina” are only given to the people who draw an engagement. Fourth, the family after marrying will be regarded as a small and holy church. Fifth, church can admit the existence of marriage. The fact that the clergy takes part in the wedding means the new family is admitted as a small church by the large one. And the new one is a part of church body. Priest has to attend the wedding when they get married but he is not for hosting, just as a witness. The wedding is hold vol-

untarily. And from a point of view on marriage’s validity, wedding could not be hold, but once decided, there must be one priest in it. Sixth, for Christians, they will be treated as fornication and adultery without informing church when they get married. Seventh, the secret marriage was forbid in church or counties. The people stick that this kind of marriage was fornication although it was host by clergy, so, the church cannot admit secret marriage^[3].

3 Christian Cultural Influence on the Love of Romeo and Juliet

3.1 The Effect of Christian Love on Romeo and Juliet

The author knows from *Romeo and Juliet* that Christian love had an impact on the love of Romeo and Juliet. So, the intimacy, passion and commitment in the love of Romeo and Juliet were influenced by Christian love.

First, Christian love influenced the love of Romeo and Juliet in intimacy. For example, “Exit ROMEO [To JULIET] If I profane with my unworhiest hand. This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss^[4].” (1.5.95-102) From the words “profane”, “holy”, “shrine”, “pilgrim” We can know that there was some Christian ideas in Romeo’s mind and he regarded his kiss as a holy thing. The conversation between them reflected one of the meanings that love is talking friendly in Christian love. It is God who shortened their distance. That is the influence in intimacy.

Second, Christian love influenced their passion. For instance, “I have more care to stay than will to go: Come, death, and welcome. Juliet wills it so. How is’t, my soul? Let’s talk; it is not day^[4].” (3.5.23-25) The word “soul” reflects that Romeo was influenced deeply by Christian love because the real meaning of Christian love means the attracting between soul and body. Romeo regarded Juliet as his soul so that they can continue their passion.

Third, Christian love influenced their commitment. God, who is regarded as love in Christianity, had Romeo and Juliet expressed love to each other. For example, “ROMEO With love’s light wings did I o’er-perch these walls; For stony limits cannot hold love out, And what love can do that dares love attempt; Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me^[4].” (2.2.66-69) And for another example, “JULIET But to be frank, and give it thee again. And yet I wish but for the thing I have:

My bounty is as boundless as the sea, My love as deep; the more I give to thee, The more I have, for both are infinite^[4].” (2.2.131-135) From the two sentences, the author learns that they expressed love in their hearts. That means they exchange their value, contributing their common dream, love, which is in accordance with the meaning of Christian love. And we can also learn the Christian love from this example, “ROMEO Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—JULIET O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon, That monthly changes in her circled orb, Lest thy love prove likewise variable. ROMEO What shall I swear by? JULIET Do not swear at all; Or, if thou wilt, swear by gracious self, Which is the god of my idolatry, And I’ll believe thee^[4].” (2.2.107-114) the author can learn that there is a concept of god in his mind according to some words such as “blessed”, “swear”, “god”, “idolatry”. So, it was proved that Romeo and Juliet were influenced by Christianity.

3.2 The Effect of Christian Marriage on Romeo and Juliet

In intimacy, Romeo decided the form of religious marriage to marry with Juliet. And in ACT III, SCENE V and ACT V, SCENE III, Romeo called Juliet wife as well as Juliet called Romeo husband, Just as following saying goes: “Exit JULIET Then, window, let day in, and let life out. ROMEO Farewell, farewell! One kiss, and I’ll descend. He goeth down JULIET Art thou gone so? Love, lord, ay, husband, friend!^[4]” (3.5.41-43) and “Death, lie thou there, by a dead man interr’d. Laying PARIS in the tomb How oft when men are at the point of death Have they been merry! Which their keepers call A lightning before death: O, how may I Call this a lightning? O my love! my wife!^[4]” (5.3.86-91) From these sentences, the word “husband” and “wife” reflected the word “dominus” and “domina”. That means they accepted the holy status from god in the wedding according to the third point in the part of two in literature review. So they could call husband or wife to each intimately. So, their intimacy in love was influenced by the institution of marriage in Christianity.

In passion, here are some words from ACT III, SCENE V, “Enter ROMEO and JULIET above, at the window JULIET Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day: It was the nightingale, and not the lark, That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear; Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree: Believe me, love, it was the nightingale. ROMEO. It was the lark, the

herald of the morn, No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east: Night’s candles are burnt out, and jocund day Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops^[4].” (3.5.1-10) From this paragraph, we can know that Romeo stayed with Juliet overnight. But why he can stay with Juliet overnight? It is because they were influenced by Christian marriage. From the drama, the author knows that they are godly Christian. They were married in church, which was host by Lawrence. They cannot stay with each other overnight without marrying in church because “for Christians, they will be treated as fornication and adultery without informing church when they get married.” according to the sixth point in the second part of literature review. So the passion in their love was influenced by the institution of marriage in Christianity.

In commitment, from the story of Romeo and Juliet, the author knows the process of their commitment. First, Juliet made a promise to Romeo that she will marry with him if Romeo prepares one wedding. For example “JULIET Three words, dear Romeo, and good night in deed. If that thy bent of love be honorable, Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow, By one that I’ll procure to come to thee, Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite; And all my fortunes at thy foot I’ll lay And follow thee my lord throughout the world^[4].” (2.2.142-148) Second, Romeo agreed her and made a decision to her. For instance, “JULIET At what o’clock to-morrow Shall I send to thee? ROMEO: At the hour of nine. JULIET I will not fail: ’tis twenty years till then^[4].” (2.2. 168-169) Third, Romeo was ready to realize their commitments in his heart just as following saying goes, “ROMEO Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast! Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest! Hence will I to my ghostly father’s cell, His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell.”^[4] (2.2.186-189) Fourth, Romeo took actions to realize their commitments, for example, “ROMEO Then plainly know my heart’s dear love is set On the fair daughter of rich Capulet: As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine; And all combined, save what thou must combine By holy marriage: when and where and how We met, we wood’s and made exchange of vow, I’ll tell thee as we pass: but this I pray, That thou consent to marry us to-day^[4].” (2.3.57-64) Finally, the commitment of priest influenced Romeo and Juliet’s commitments about marriage. While, the realization of their commitments means their love came true. For example, “But come, young waver-er, come, go with me, In one respect I’ll thy assistant

be; For this alliance may so happy prove, To turn your households' rancour to pure love^[4]." (2.4.89-92) The priest influenced their love completely. If there is no priest's help, they would not get married in church. And if not married in church, the commitments of Romeo and Juliet would not realize because Romeo chose the religious marriage. So, it is religious marriage that made their commitment of love come true, which reflects that the commitment in their love was influenced by the institution of marriage in Christianity. Meanwhile, the wedding was depending on the personal help of the priest, Lawrence, but according to the seventh point in literature review, church cannot admit secret marriage because the priest belongs to Catholicism, but the priest preferred to help them.

Generally speaking, the intimacy, passion, commitment in the love of Romeo and Juliet were influenced respectively by the concept of love as well as the system of marriage in Christianity.

4 Conclusion

In summarize, the author learns the background of Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare. First, the author in this paper put forward a question that why Shakespeare designed the priest, Lawrence. From my point of view, Shakespeare wants to tell us the relationship between religion and love.

Second, to solve this problem, the writer gives an

analysis by combining the theory of *Religious Studies and the New Psychology of Love* according to the example of Romeo and Juliet. The analysis suggests that the love of Romeo and Juliet belongs to Romantic Love, whose intimacy, passion, commitment are influenced respectively by the concept of love as well as the system of marriage in Christianity.

Third, Christianity is also a kind of sociocultural system. So, the author can draw a conclusion that religion can influence love. And this is the interpretation from the perspective of a Chinese.

Meanwhile, the researches mentioned above are great academic value and they are very helpful. In contrast to the studies at home and abroad, the author could find the values and significance of this story. Therefore, based on the current theories and research methods, research Romeo and Juliet will have sufficient space for development.

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