Shylock, Victim of Racial Discrimination

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Abstract. In view of the hero of Shakespeare's play The Merchant of Venice, Shylock is deeply branded by racial discrimination on the Jew from the historical background, Shakespeare's religious tendency and Shylock's natural resistance as the oppressed.

Introduction

There is no doubt that William Shakespeare is the most outstanding dramatist in the history of English literature, one of the most outstanding writers in the history of Western literature and art, and one of the most outstanding writers in the world. But in his thirty-eight plays, The Merchant of Venice is regarded as one of Shakespeare's problem plays.

Synopsis: Antonio, a Venetian businessman, is generous and never charges interest to lend money to others. Shylock, a Jew, hates it. Antonio borrowed money from Shylock in order to help his friend Bassanio get married. Shylock pretended to be generous and not to take interest, but signed a contract with Antonio that he would have to cut a pound of meat from Antonio when it expired. Antonio's cargo ship was wrecked in a storm at sea and was unable to repay the loan as scheduled. Meanwhile, Shylock's only daughter took all her family's treasures and eloped with Christians and converted to Christianity. Shylock turned his sadness into anger and insisted on cutting a pound of flesh meat from Antonio. Bassanio's wife Portia appeared in court as a lawyer to defend Antonio and allowed Shylock to cut meat, but not much or less. It happened to be a pound. Moreover, when cutting meat, one cannot shed "a drop of Christian blood" from him. Otherwise, "according to Venetian law, one should be convicted of intentional murder, half of the property should be confiscated and the other half would belong to Antonio". Instead of getting a pound of Antonio's flesh meat, Shylock was punished and eventually lost the lawsuit.

Perhaps the reason for calling it a problem play is mainly due to the controversial role of the play. Shylock who is the villain or the victim of the play? Is his mad revenge for his enemy Antonio cruel? Or is it justifiable? In this struggle between Christians and Jews in Venice, which side of Shakespeare's position is particularly critical? It is not easy to answer these questions, but it is not without trace. Moreover, Shylock has a strong brand of victims of racial discrimination.

Reasons

First Reason

It's a brief historical review of the tragic experience of the Jewish nation

- Firstly, In medieval Western Europe, land was regarded as the most precious wealth, while commerce was the industry that people despised. The Jews, without their own country and land, had to migrate everywhere to make a living by doing business. When they moved to Western Europe, they were discriminated against by local feudal lords.
- Secondly, there are religious reasons for the hatred of Jews in Western Europe, including Italy and Britain. The Old Testament, one of the Christian classics, is originally a Jewish classic. There is a close historical origin between the two religions. Christian doctrine holds that Judas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, betrayed Jesus and that it was the Jews who crucified him, which caused Christians to hate Jews emotionally.
Thirdly, Since the Middle Ages, Jews have been discriminated against and segregated as pagans and Christian killers in European Christian Society for more than a thousand years, and there have been waves of anti-Semitism. At that time, Jews were regarded as "moral leprosy patients" as pariahs.

Fourthly When Shakespeare wrote The Merchant of Venice in 16th century England, Jews suffered no less oppression than any other country in Europe. In fact, during the Elizabethan period in which Shakespeare lived, anti-Semitism was very high. Edward I (1272-1307) ordered the expulsion of Jews from Britain three hundred years before Shakespeare's reign. But during Shakespeare's life, some Jews still lived in London. They have to conceal their identity and religious beliefs because of the civil customs and decrees. They were persecuted to hide property in order to avoid confiscation; they had to collect huge amounts of cash because they were afraid to buy property; and because they had huge amounts of cash, they tended to lend money as their own business, so they could collect heavy profits.

Fifthly, Jews are generally united because they are wandering outside. In this way, almost everywhere there will be Jewish gatherings, they will be huddled together. Think about it. If you were a king, would you tolerate a group of very united outsiders on your own territory, who were very rich, or pagans? That is to say, there are many Japanese living near Tiananmen in Beijing China today. After a long time, you will be disgusted.

Therefore, it is in the background of Jewish tragic experience in history that the destiny of Shylock is doomed to be an inescapable historical fate.

Second Reason

An analysis of Shakespeare's personal religious tendency So far, the academic circles generally believe that Shakespeare believed in Christianity. As a playwright, it is not surprising that Christian culture has Christian consciousness in his works. "Shakespeare's Christian cultural education and edification has been internalized into a kind of unconsciousness, affecting his ideological composition. Renaissance humanistic culture itself was bred in the mother of Christian culture, although it was bred in the reaction to Christianity, which was essentially different from Christianity. But it also injected the blood of Christian culture. [1]

In addition, an important theme of Shakespeare's plays is "kindness", which is often associated with the "universal love" preached by Christianity. In the play The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare asked Portia to utter such a famous proclamation-like grandeur:

- "Compassion does not come from reluctance, it descends from heaven like a good rain after a long drought;
- it not only gives happiness to those who receive it, but also to those who give it;
- it has supreme power, more than the crown, to show the nobility of an emperor:...
- So, Jews, although you are asking for justice, please think about it, if you really carry out the reward and punishment according to justice, no one has hope of salvation after death;
- since we pray for God's mercy, we should do something compassionate ourselves according to the direction of prayer.” [2]

Not only in the play The Merchant of Venice, but also in almost every script, he quotes allusions and verses from the Bible many times. For example, in his famous tragedy Hamlet, the Scriptures are influenced by the Bible and are famous for the large number of Biblical quotations. There is a famous line in the play:

- "Life or death, this is the question that people should consider."

So almost all his works are deeply influenced by Christian thought. French writer Hugo once said,

- "Britain shaped Shakespeare, while the Bible shaped Britain."

From Shakespeare's will, we can see that he has a firm faith in Christ. At the beginning of his will, he said,

"In the name of God, Amen, Shakespeare thanks God. I am in perfect health and have a good memory. I will make my last will."
First of all, I put my soul in the hands of God the Creator, hoping and believing that only by the grace of Jesus, my Savior, can I be blessed with eternal life.

And my body will return to dust, because I am out of dust."

At the age of fifty-two, he rested in the bosom of the Lord. The tombstone was inscribed with a humorous epitaph that he reportedly wrote for himself before his death:

"For Jesus’ sake, good friend, never dig out the coffin under the loess; let my rest be blessed by God."

It is this Christian tendency of Shakespeare that determines his position in the creation of scripts - the opposition of Jews. As a Jewish businessman who lent money, Shylock decided his tragic role in the play from the very beginning. It can only act as a clown who is ridiculed and rejected in comedy.

**Third Reason**

From the perspective of the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed

As a Jew, Shylock had the same fate as most other Jews. In the Middle Ages, Jews were regarded as inferior nationalities by European countries. They suffered religious persecution, had no political rights and freedoms, and were subject to various economic restrictions. They were persecuted, discriminated, plundered and murdered in different countries in different historical periods. In order to survive and strive for equal status with other nationalities, they unite together against the outside world, abide by laws and regulations, and strive for self-improvement. However, Jews are skilled in business and finance. In this field, they sometimes do not speak of humanity and morality, and make full use of opportunities that many others disdain to take advantage of. Some of them do cruel, tricky and despicable things as long as they have the opportunity and do not break the law.

For a Jew, who has not been recognized by the so-called aristocrats of the upper world, Shylock suffered a lot of oppression and resentment. Is this racial discrimination fair to him? I think it is unfair to criticize this character as a miser. Shylock just vented his anger, at the end of the trial. Regarding money, he just wanted to ease a grievance through the issue of lending money, even without considering the money. For the Jewish nation under racial oppression for a long time, Shylock is undoubtedly a hero. Because he dares to stand up under oppression. Any nation, under extreme severe oppression, will rise up and fight for equal rights and freedom. The so-called "not erupt in silence, but perish in silence". Aren't we Chinese people who have suffered many hardships and paid a great price to stand in today's world? So the Jewish nation is no exception, and Shylock is exactly the representative of this suffering nation who dares to speak out.

In the play -The Merchant of Venice, Shylock says to two men,

- "He once humiliated me and took away hundreds of thousands of dollars from my business.
- Laugh at my losses and mock my surplus;
- slander my nation and destroy my business;
- alienate my friends and incite my enemies.
- And what is his reason? Just because I am a Jew!
- Do Jews have no eyes? No hands? The viscera? Perception, Emotion, Passion?
- Don't you eat the same food? Wounded by the same weapon? Are they entangled with the same disease? [3]

Apparentely, this is Shylock's complaint against Antonio. So when he owed Antonio money and his friends were willing to pay him several times the principal, they insisted on cutting off a pound of Antonio's flesh meat according to the contract. And stubbornly insist that

- "even if each of the six thousand dollars can be divided into six parts, each can be turned into a dollar, I do not want them, I just punish according to the contract." [3]

Shylock insisted on cutting off one of his body. It's like putting Antonio to death. But it is precisely this that proves that Shylock is by no means Antonio's mercenary miser. His revenge for Antonio was marked by national hatred and long-standing oppressed resistance. It was the hatred accumulated by such discrimination that made him want to retaliate mercilessly and hysterically against Antonio.
Conclusion

Therefore, no matter from the historical background, the author's religious tendency and Shylock's natural resistance as an oppressed person, it shows that racial discrimination is deeply branded on the Jewish businessman. He is the real victim of racial discrimination. Of course, this does not mean that Shylock is a passionate, demanding role for the people. At best, he is a shrewd rascal who has torn his face and grabbed the pigtails of the exploiting class to justify his crimes. In his "pitiful" monologues, the word "Jew" is used again and again to arouse sympathy, but in fact, he is not the Jewish people in general, but the exploiter who is in opposition to the working people. When he is faced with those debtors who are also "flesh-and-bone, conscious", he will not be reluctant to squeeze the last drop from them. Blood. His monologues about "Jews" only relied on the injustice suffered by his own nation to excuse himself and put on a disgraceful cloak for himself. So, no matter how eloquent Shylock's monologue is, what he demands is not the basic human rights of the people, but the privileges of a usurer to the upper ruling class.

To sum up, Shylock, as an immortal artistic model in the history of world literature, is well-deserved. He is the first humanized, flesh-and-blood Jew with his own personality on the British stage. His personality is distinct, prominent and generalized. His image is rich and complex, that is, with the imprint of the times, class emblem and national characteristics. He is not only a profit-seeking usurer, but also a pagan who is discriminated against by others. He is also an exposor of national contradictions. He is different from a series of miser images created by some great writers in the past. He marks Shakespeare's outstanding achievements in characterization. In this character, the author creates "a great sensitivity and personality". Image "not only enlarges our understanding of human nature, but also destroys the unity of the plot to a certain extent (Charlton language), thus achieving the desired effect. Sherlock is abominable, all his actions are money-centered, thus indifferent to the kinship, friendship and benevolence between people; Sherlock is poor, weak in power, he is difficult to argue before Venetian law and ultimately defeated; of course, Sherlock also has his appreciation, he in the struggle against the wrong ruling group of darkness was real. It is because of this different personality factor that the character created by the writer is not damaged by the flood of time. On the contrary, it will emit more compelling and eternal artistic glory with the passage of time.

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