

A Comparative Study of Bai Liusu in *Love in a Fallen City* and Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* from the Perspective of Feminism

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Abstract: There are many similarities between Bai Liusu in *Love in a Fallen City* and Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Both were born in declining aristocratic families and they are ladies; They once got married; They all have great hopes for remarriage, hoping to change their own destiny and no longer become a burden to others. However, in their eyes, marriage is just a means of livelihood rather than the destination of love. However, there are more differences between Bai Liusu and Blanche: Blanche has a shameful past of depravity while Bai Liusu does not; Bai Liusu has relatives such as her mother, elder brothers, sisters-in-law, and younger sister; whereas Blanche only has one sister who is dependent on her husband; Bai Liusu is able to plan for herself in the long run, but Blanche's nerves almost collapse and she has no one to rely on. From bad to worse, her families pass away, her husband commits suicide, her brother-in-law takes revenge on her, and her new boyfriend leaves her. The biggest difference between them is the outcome of their destinies: Bai Liusu finally gets the marriage she has always dreamed of while Blanche is abandoned by her boyfriend and raped by her brother-in-law before being sent to an asylum.

Keywords: Bai Liu Su; Blanche; feminism; similarities; differences

1. Introduction

Love in a Fallen City is a comedy romance set in Shanghai and Hong Kong, China during the Second World War. The novel depicts the intricate love story of the female protagonist Bai Liusu. The general plot of the story is that Bai Liusu was born in a wealthy family, but unexpectedly her family's fortunes decline and she suffers from the blow of divorce and poverty. When she has to stay at the dilapidated home, she is not welcomed by her elder brothers and sisters-in-law. However, an accidental blind date makes her come across a wealthy businessman named Fan Liuyuan. Eventually, Bai Liusu gets the marriage she has dreamed of.

The Streetcar Named Desire is a tragic story set in the United States, reflecting the conflicts and opposition between the plantation culture of the old South and modern industrial civilization. The novel tells the tragic life story of the female protagonist Blanche DuBois. She came from a wealthy family in the southern United States and received refined education when she was young. As she grows up, she becomes a beloved beauty and a lady in people's eyes. However, unexpectedly, after getting married, Blanche discovers that her beloved husband is cheating on her. What is even more terrifying is that his partner is an old man. Later, her husband commits suicide by shooting himself after the scandal is exposed by Blanche unconsciously, which Blanche feels deeply guilty for. As a result, her fate takes a turning point. Step by step, Blanche loses everything she once had, and her life becomes worse and worse. When she is struggling to survive from all sides, she seeks refuge with her sister Stella. There is an irreconcilable conflict between Blanche and her brother-in-law Stanley, who believes that Blanche would threaten his control over the family and his marital relationship with Stella. In order to drive away Blanche, Stanley launches a rough and crazy attack on her. He uses various means to deal with her, causing Blanche, who is already in turmoil, to be pushed little by little into an irreparable abyss of life.

Since Bai Liusu and Blanche grow up and live in different social and cultural backgrounds, there are many differences between them. In such a situation, Blanche seems more possible to grasp her own destiny and pursue her own happiness while Bai Liusu is more likely to follow the arrangement of fate and accept others' advice. But the result is exactly the opposite. On the other hand, from the perspective

of human nature and social background, they have many similarities. So analyzing these two characters from a feminist perspective may reveal many thought-provoking aspects.

2. Bai Liusu's and Blanche's similar origins and situations

2.1 Bai Liusu's origins and situations

Bai Liusu and Blanche share many similarities: they were both born in declining aristocratic families, received a good education since childhood, and both considered themselves as ladies and old-fashioned people. Later on, they all encountered the decline of their families. They have all had the unfortunate life experience of marriage, husband or divorce or even death; they all have great hopes for remarriage, hoping to change their own destiny and no longer become a burden to others. They are all tortured by fate to be very pragmatic, because in their eyes marriage is only a means of making a living rather than for love.

The Bai family was wealthy and prosperous in southern China during the early 20th century. But in fact, Bai Liusu is just the daughter of a poor and destitute aristocrat. Because "Liusu's father was a famous gambler who lost everything in order to gamble, and was the first to lead them to becoming broken."^[1] Although the family has fallen, it still belongs to the aristocratic class. Bai Liusu is the sixth child in the family, and her brothers and sisters-in-law are regarded as the young masters and the young ladies. Bai Liusu's problem is that she has already been a married woman, but she gets divorced and returns to her parents' home. She is despised by her brothers and sisters-in-law and even her own mother. She is very lonely.

2.2 Blanche's origins and situations

Similarly, Blanche once lived a happy life. She lived in a large estate in the southern United States and she is a gentle and kind woman herself. Unfortunately, like Bai Liusu, her home also slides into decline. From prosperity to decline, it may have a similar impact or blow on a person's fate. Accordingly, Blanche and Bai Liusu have similar life experiences.

Sociological feminist literary criticism has conducted extensive and in-depth research on various aspects of women's identity, role, background, status, values, etc. from multiple perspectives. Therefore, it provides rich theoretical reference and guidance for people who study women's issues. One prominent aspect is that this theory mainly discusses women's issues from an anti-male perspective. According to the feminist literary criticism theory in sociology, the similar background and situation of Bai Liusu and Blanche are the atmosphere of a completely patriarchal society. This atmosphere may be the root of their unfortunate experiences^[2].

3. Bai Liusu and Blanche hold similar views on marriage

3.1 Bai Liusu's views on marriage

They have all had marriages before, and their husbands left or even died; they all place great hopes on remarriage, hoping to change their destiny and no longer become a burden to others. In their eyes, marriage is just a means of livelihood rather than the destination of love.

Influenced by the trend of the times, Bai Liusu recognizes the value that women's happiness is determined by men. In her eyes, finding a financially capable husband is the best home for women and the best way for her to gain secular recognition. After her divorce, Bai Liusu lives in her mother's house and is despised by her elder brothers and sisters-in-law in a patriarchal society.

Under the bondage and influence of patriarchal ideology and culture, Bai Liusu herself does not have much room for free choice. She cannot go out to work. In that case, she will lose her ladylike identity, and once she loses that, it will be difficult for her to obtain a better marriage. Of course, if you cannot get an ideal marriage, you will naturally not get respect from your peers and you will lose your due dignity. However, Bai Liusu has a clear mind, survival wisdom, and the ability to plan for herself in the long run. As Ma Wenbin said, "*Love in a Fallen City* not only depicts false love and a profit-driven marriage, but also shows the oppression of women and the cruelty of life in society at that time. The women in the book, including the protagonist Bai Liusu, are all victims of the feudal autocratic male dominated society and writers of the tragic song of fate..."^[3]. However, what sets Bai Liusu apart from

other women at that time is that she does not completely surrender or give in. She is trying her best to break free from the constraints of fate and society. In *Bai Liusu*, it can be seen that women at that time have a low social status. Most of them place their fate on men. To get rid of this situation, they have to constantly struggle and endure various criticisms and obstacles. *Bai Liusu* is a microcosm of the times when women hope to change their status and destiny.^[4] After being subjected to domestic violence, she resolutely gets divorced with her incompetent husband. She doesn't want to live alone, she wants to find a suitable marriage partner to remarry. She knows very well that although she is 28 years old, and she does not receive much education nor have a strong ability to live by herself, she can still remarry at this age. Marriage is the best way to solve her dilemma. She persists like this, and good luck does come her way. She unexpectedly meets Fan Liuyuan, a rich businessman. Fan Liuyuan is considered as "a ideal husband" by everyone. He inherits a lot of property from his famous overseas Chinese father, but he is also cynical. For *Bai Liusu*, although she has a mother, brothers and sisters-in-law, she knows clearly that no one will help her out. She can only rely on herself. She decides to bet her future on winning the seemingly unattainable "good man" Fan Liuyuan. During this period of love development, *Bai Liusu* is always able to hold onto her bottom line, and perhaps achieving her dreams is a reward for her.

3.2 *Blanche's views on marriage*

Blanche's thought is also bound by strong traditional ideas. Her living environment and the personality characteristics formed in such an environment determine that she is unable to break free from it. In fact, she is also addicted to such a feeling without awakening. Although Blanche was born into a luxurious mansion, this does not change a fundamental fact: it is still a world of men, and men are the controllers and leaders there. Blanche wants to live happily and please men like women in other places. Of course, from the perspective of sociological feminist literary criticism, it is an unfortunate existence that such women are passive, submissive, and lack self-awareness. Blanche is influenced by various things in that manor since she was a child, and she unconsciously forms her outlook. She is willing to demand, restrain, and evaluate herself based on the norms of male dominated culture. She is a noble lady before and after her marriage. In the eyes of feminist literary critics in sociology, after marriage, Blanche also consciously adheres to the traditional view of male supremacy in women's morality. Because Blanche's view is that 50% of a girl's charm relies on illusions, and she cleverly follows the so-called rule that "ladies must entertain men"^[5]. Blanche has no sense of resisting reality, only blindly accepting the shackles of patriarchal culture, which should be the character and psychological reason for her life tragedy.

From a feminist perspective, the formation of *Bai Liusu* and Blanche's similar views on marriage reveals that their traditional views on the role of women's identity, status, and values are incorrect, as they are based on the ideas of a patriarchal social system. Under such a mindset, women have always been in a disadvantaged, secondary, and passive social environment. As a result, women do not have the opportunity to be independent of the world, but are treated as a subordinate second sex as a mirror. Once it becomes a tool, it cannot exist independently, but exists and functions in a way that is dependent on its owner. The owner here is male. Before marriage, women obey their fathers, and after marriage, they obey their husbands. This is not only true in China, but also in other patriarchal cultures, and the relationship between men and women is also the same. Blanche is precisely under such cultural constraints. She cannot live independently because they are a part of men.

On the other hand, the long-term control and influence of patriarchal culture on society, coupled with the important position and role of men in actual social life, work, and struggle under backward production and living conditions, have gradually made women naturally accept the concept of male dominance in society. Moreover, gradually they internalize that as their own value orientation, willingly relying on men economically and spiritually, and living for men^[6].

4. *Bai Liusu and Blanche's different past experiences*

4.1 *Bai Liusu's unhappy experience*

The differences between *Bai Liusu* and Blanche are more notable. *Bai Liusu* has relatives such as her mother, elder brothers, sisters-in-law, and younger sister, while Blanche only has one sister who is dependent on her husband; Blanche has a shameful past, while *Bai Liusu* does not; *Bai Liusu* has a clear mind, survival wisdom, and the ability to plan in the long run; But Blanche's nerves are on the

verge of collapse, with no one to rely on and only able to seek refuge with her only sister. Even worse, Blanche is deeply affected - her loved ones passed away, her gay husband committed suicide, her brother-in-law retaliated, and her boyfriend left.

The marital experiences of Blanche and Bai Liusu are also vastly different. Bai Liusu has no feelings about her marriage experience and it is she who took the initiative to file for divorce. That marriage does not cast a shadow on her heart.

4.2 Blanche's notorious experience

But Blanche is different. She loves her husband very deeply. But the sudden major change comes as a heavy blow to her. The successive severe blows leave Blanche unable to break away from the shadow imprinted in her heart. The suicide of her husband Allen serves as an irreparable trauma in Blanche's heart.

After this tragedy, Blanche suffers other misfortunes, losing her job and ancestral house. When Blanche begins living with her sister and brother-in-law, her problems with Stanley soon become apparent. Blanche soon realizes that she would have to leave her sister and search for a place where she could survive again.

The biggest difference between Blanche and Bai Liusu lies in their different endings: the fall of Hong Kong, China fulfills Bai Liusu's wish - to see true feelings between Fan Liuyuan and her in times of hardship. They become depend on each other, completely understanding each other, and Bai Liusu finally gets the marriage she has always dreamed of. Of course, the reason for this happy ending is that Bai Liusu has found true love. There is true love between her and Fan Liuyuan. Behind their refined behavior and probing language are two passionate hearts. They actually fall in love with each other when they first met, but their different life experiences have caused differences in their views on love. It seems that they always cannot honestly face their own hearts or think from each other's perspective. The outbreak of war gives Bai Liusu an opportunity to understand that love is far more important than interests, and Fan Liuyuan understands that a solid married life is far more important than the romance that he pursued before. At this time, love is eternal. In contrast, Blanche is abandoned by her boyfriend and raped by her brother-in-law before being sent to an asylum. She is completely trapped in a tragic life that could not be redeemed. She is unable to find a love marriage that may change her fate again.

Analyzing the different pasts of Bai Liusu and Blanche from a feminist perspective, we find that these two characters have been influenced and constrained by similar traditional concepts, and have been poisoned to varying degrees. Bai liusu has a sense of resistance and self-protection while Blanche does not.

5. The different endings of Bai Liusu and Blanche

5.1 Bai Liusu's happy ending

The biggest difference between Bai Liusu and Blanche lies in their different endings - her persistent persistence fulfills Bai Liusu's wishes, while Blanche, who gave up on herself, is (mentally) destroyed: raped by her brother-in-law, abandoned by her boyfriend, and her only sister compromised with reality.

In the end, the love game between Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan comes to a successful conclusion due to the war. Bai Liusu obtains the marriage she has been longing for, and Fan Liuyuan receives the moment of sincerity he has been looking for^[7].

5.2 Blanche's tragic ending

Blanche is not so lucky. In order to retaliate against and expel Blanche, Stanley uses the most brutal language to attack her and alienate her from others. Not only that, Stanley also rapes Blanche and physically destroys her on the night Stella when is in the hospital waiting for giving birth to her kid. Blanche, who has been repeatedly hit and unable to fight, falls into the abyss of tragic fate.

Mickey, who once gave Blanche a glimmer of hope, also abandons her. Blanche once again loses the opportunity to be reborn. In fact, Blanche's tragic fate "stems from the drastic ethical environment caused by the decline of the estate, and the core lies in her refusal to change her ethical identity to adapt to the ethical environment"^[8]. Her severely constrained and unchangeable beliefs completely destroy

her.

From the feminist perspective, the different fates of Bai Liusu and Blanche are closely related to their environmental differences and differences to the degree of influence of traditional beliefs. The success of Bai Liusu's marriage may seem like an opportunity given to her by war, but in fact, it is her persistence that leads to true love. Her persistence stems from her not sinking and not accepting the arrangement of fate. While she repeatedly suffers from unfortunate familial, social and cultural environment, Bai liusu does not let herself into a tragic fate.

The tragic ending of Blanche is also related to her family environment, social and cultural environment. Lack of family care and support makes her more likely to fall into the abyss. But the most important thing is that she does not stick to what she should have. Therefore, to some extent, Blanche's tragedy is not only one of the times and society, but also one of the individual ^[9].

6. Reasons for differences between Bai liusu and Blanche

To begin with, although Bai Liusu's family does not treat Bai Liusu well, Bai Liusu could still get a place to stay there after all. However, Blanche is far from so lucky. Unlike Bai Liusu, Blanche not only lost her job, but also her place to stay.

Secondly, Bai liusu does not have the shameful past of Blanche. Blanche has an unforgettable past. She admitted that "having had many intimate relationships with strangers... being affectionate with strangers is the only way for me to fill my empty heart". Blanche goes astray and is eventually dismissed from her teaching position and subsequently expelled from her hometown. This plants the seeds of disaster for her future tragedy and is also an important reason for Blanche's ultimate tragedy.

Blanche does not derive any pleasure from her absurd and depraved behavior. In fact, Blanche's attitude towards traditional culture is contradictory: both adhering to and deviating from it. Neither can she abandon the past nor integrate into reality, struggling between tradition and reality. Unlike Blanche, Bai Liusu is pure and self-loving, able to always maintain her own bottom line.

7. Conclusion

This article combines relevant theories of feminist literary theory to compare and analyze the female protagonist Bai Liusu in *Love in a Fallen City* and the female protagonist Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* from the perspectives of ideological concepts and practical factors. Thus, it can be concluded that Bai Liusu and Blanche have many similarities: they were both born in declining aristocratic families, have elegant manners, and regard themselves as ladies. They all have great hopes for remarriage after an unfortunate marriage, hoping to change their destiny. The setbacks in life make them realize that marriage is just a means of livelihood rather than the destination of love.

However, there are more differences between Bai Liusu and Blanche. The biggest difference between them lies in the different endings: the relentless pursuit and adherence to the bottom line Bai liusu sets for herself help her achieve her dream marriage. Blanche, however, fails to effectively resist fate and uphold the bottom line she should uphold. After being abandoned by her boyfriend and raped by her brother-in-law, she is sent to a mental hospital. Step by step, she is pushed into the abyss of mental breakdown by fate, ultimately losing the opportunity to change her dark past and achieve a new life.

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