



Piercing the Veil of God, Revealing Human Nature

—Analyzing the Dance Drama “The Orphan of Zhao” from the Perspective of “People”

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Abstract

The Orphan of Zhao, presented by China National Opera and Dance Theater, is adapted from the Yuan Dynasty drama of the same name. Through the combination of dance and music, it shows the complex inner world and emotional changes of the characters. On the stage, the dancers convey the joys and sorrows of the characters through body language, allowing the audience to feel the emotional fluctuations of the characters more intuitively. In addition, on the basis of retaining the core story of the original work, the dance drama has made innovative adaptations to the relationships between the characters and the development of the plot, making the whole story more three-dimensional and richer. Through this art form, the dance drama The Orphan of Zhao not only tells an ancient story, but also explores the complexity of human nature and the boundaries of morality, triggering the audience's deep reflection on themes such as loyalty, sacrifice, revenge and forgiveness. Different from the black-and-white, love-hate, decisive choice and close-to-God image creation in literary works, each character in the dance drama develops in contradictions and grows in painful choices. The characters are intertwined with each other, giving the audience more “human” thinking.

Subject Areas

Culture

Keywords

The Orphan of Zhao, Lonely Journey, Love and Righteousness, Man and God

1. Introduction

The Orphan of Zhao is a dance drama launched by the Chinese Opera and Dance Theater, adapted from the Yuan miscellaneous drama of the same name. Tells the story of the Spring and Autumn period, the state of Jin noble Zhao was treacherous minister Tu An Jia framed and was destroyed, the only bone and blood was entrusted to the door guest Cheng Ying. In the crisis of killing, Cheng Ying in order to save the lives of the Zhao orphan and the city baby, sacrificed his own flesh and blood. From then on, Cheng Ying alone embarked on a long road of loyalty. (See **Figure 1**)



Figure 1. Dance drama “The Orphan of Zhao”.

In addition, the dance drama is also very ingenious in its performance techniques. Through the arrangement of dance movements and the use of stage effects, the inner world of the characters is visualized [1]. For example, in the scene of exchanging babies for children, the dancers express Cheng Ying’s inner pain and struggle vividly through the tension of body language and the changes in rhythm. The ups and downs of the music and the changes in the brightness and darkness of the lights further enhance the communication of emotions, allowing the audience to feel the inner world of the characters more intuitively.

The dance drama “The Orphan of Zhao” is not only a visual and auditory feast, but also a profound exploration of human nature. Therefore, this paper will analyze it from the perspective of people “, and study how to modernize the characters in traditional stories through the art form of dance, so that the audience can appreciate the art, but also think about the deep-seated issues such as human nature, morality, and responsibility.

2. On the Full Image of the Orphan

Scene 1: Cheng Ying swings forward

When the Zhao family was exterminated, many members of the Zhao family dressed in white were groaning in pain on the ground. Cheng Ying, a doctor and a retainer, staggered out with a medicine box, hoping to save everyone’s lives. At this time, Zhuang Ji took the remaining members of the Zhao family and entrusted

them to Cheng Ying. The diagonal opposition formed by the continuous approach of the people on the stage and Cheng Ying's hasty retreat was his first hesitation—Zhao's shelter was a favor, but how could I survive under Tu'an Jia's rule?

The fear of taking over the orphan and the joy of his wife giving birth to a baby boy came at the same time. Cheng Ying briefly fell into the gentle land of love and companionship with his wife. The delicate duet of the two dancers brought the audience into the scene of a couple cherishing their child and looking forward to its birth. But with the appearance of the red curtain, the news that Tu Anjia had gathered all the newborns in the city in order to kill them all shattered the beautiful illusion. On the one hand, there was the threat of killing all the babies in the city if Zhao Gu was not handed over, and on the other hand, how could I bear to sacrifice my own child—this was his second hesitation. (See **Figure 2**)

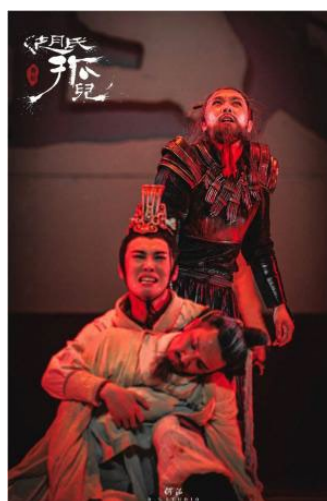


Figure 2. Cheng Ying from the dance drama “The Orphan of Zhao”.

Time keeps moving forward. The baby of the past has gradually grown into a young man full of vigor and vitality, while Cheng Ying is getting older in his nightmares [2]. The dance begins with Cheng Ying and Zhao Gu. Zhao Gu's curiosity about the medicine box and Cheng Ying's implicit rejection of his martial arts are entangled with each other. It is not until Tu'an Jia appears that the rivalry between the “father and son” gradually subsides. Then, a long three-person dance is performed through the playfulness and fighting between the young man and the person in power. It seems that Cheng Ying is tied between the two with a trouser rope, but in fact, he is being dragged outside of the two. It is not until they fall to the ground and are ignored that Cheng Ying realizes that he, a mere scholar, has long been unable to cope with the situation. Zhao Gu is getting closer and closer to the murderer of his father, and even has the tendency to inherit his legacy. He is wavering again—should the only child really bear the blood feud? But if he is left alone, how can the wronged soul of the Zhao family rest in peace?

In this constant sway, Cheng Ying moves forward, either forced, spontaneously,

or unconsciously. He constantly gains and losses, step by step, losing his own children, his beloved wife, the respect of the city residents, the closeness of Zhao Gu, and finally, his own life, becoming a lone man walking alone in the world. Unlike the noble self-sacrificing God in Yuan Zaju, he in the dance drama is closer to an ordinary person with seven emotions and six desires, a lone man moving forward in a swaying state, and an extraordinarily righteous man with a sad atmosphere.

Scene 1 Author's Comments

In the dance drama *The Orphan of Zhao*, Cheng Ying's image is endowed with more complex human characteristics [3]. He is not a single heroic image, but an ordinary person struggling under the dual pressures of morality and emotion. Every time he wavers, he explores the depths of human nature and questions the meaning of life. Cheng Ying's inner drama is delicately displayed through the dancers' body language and expressions, allowing the audience to feel his inner contradictions and pain.

Through the character of Cheng Ying, the dance drama shows the survival status and moral choices of people in extreme environments. The choice he faces is not only about his own life and death, but also about his responsibilities and obligations to his family, friends, and society [4]. Cheng Ying's swing is actually a challenge to traditional morality—whether it is dead for the sake of the king and the minister, or born for the small family—concept, which is also a profound revelation of the complexity of human nature. In the performance of the dance drama, the audience can see a three-dimensional, flesh-and-blood Cheng Ying. He is not only a historical figure, but also a living person, an ordinary person who grew up in pain and struggle.

Through such artistic performance, the dance drama “*The Orphan of Zhao*” not only tells an ancient story, but also touches the depths of modern people's hearts. It makes us think about whether we will also face similar moral dilemmas in modern society and whether we will waver under the pressure of reality. The image of Cheng Ying has become a mirror for people to reflect on themselves and examine human nature.

Scene 2: Zhao Wu who lost his loved ones many times

Zhao Wu was an orphan who lost his biological parents at birth. When Cheng Ying appeared, he had a “father” who cared for him. When he got along with Tu'an Jia, he also had a powerful and strong foster father. With the double care and love, he has always been a straightforward and sunny young man, so his movements are often prowling, tumbling, and his expressions are weird. It was not until his foster father asked him to raise the sword to kill that he realized in a trance that Cheng Ying's teachings and his foster father's guidance could not co-exist. The moment the medicine box was opened, Zhao Wu knew that he had a biological father whom he had never met in the past, and he also knew that he would soon lose another “father”. At the coming-of-age banquet, the dark lights and the ghostly women foreshadowed the changes in the future. After Zhao Wu received the sword and danced, he suddenly turned back and tried to assassinate

Cheng Ying, but he failed. He found that another “father” had left him first [5]. At this moment, all the Zhao family members danced with Cheng Ying, and the swords of the world fell. Zhao Wu’s emotions reached a climax, and he killed his last “father”. From then on, Zhao Wu became a real orphan in this world.

Scene 2 Author’s Comments

Zhao Wu’s tragic fate lies not only in the fact that he lost his biological parents, but also in the fact that he had to choose between his two fathers. His path to growth was full of confusion and struggle, and every choice was accompanied by pain and sacrifice. Through the character of Zhao Wu, the dance drama explores the moral and emotional conflicts that people face in the process of growing up, that is the hedge between justice and family affection. Every choice made by Zhao Wu is an exploration of self-cognition and identity, and a profound experience of good and evil, love and hate in human nature. His story allows the audience to see a child who constantly searches for himself and tries to understand the world in the twists and turns of fate. His image deeply touches people’s hearts and makes people think deeply. Zhao Wu’s dance movements and expressions vividly convey his inner contradictions and struggles, making this character full of vitality and appeal. Through Zhao Wu’s story, the dance drama “The Orphan of Zhao” shows the audience the complexity of human nature and the difficulty of moral choices, while also expressing the questioning of the meaning of life and a deep understanding of human nature. (See **Figure 3**)



Figure 3. Zhao Wutu from the dance drama “The Orphan of Zhao”.

Scene 3: The tyranny of Tu Anjia

Tu Anjia, for personal gain, wiped out the entire Zhao family, and even wanted to massacre all the babies in the city to eradicate the roots. His brutality and cruelty never won the hearts of the people, and he never felt true love under the exchange of interests. He was alone from the beginning. When Zhao Wu appeared as Cheng Bo, he seemed to have found an outlet for his emotions and raised him as his own child. The warmth could not be erased, and he seemed no longer lonely. When this child pointed the sword at himself, the treatment in the dance drama

was not anger and counterattack but confusion and shock. He fell into an ice cellar and returned to the lonely person. So, he began to go crazy, unable to believe that he still had no one to go with him even though he had reached a high position, to the imaginary dead and born Zhao sword, and was killed by his former child in a state of mental disorder.

Scene 3 Author's Comments

The tragedy of Tu'anjia lies not only in his tyranny and loneliness, but also in his deep desire for family affection and misunderstanding of human nature. His life is a portrayal of power struggle and ruthless killing, but in the end, he feels the complexity of human nature and the fragility of family affection in Zhao Wu's betrayal. Through the character of Tu'anjia, the dance drama reveals that even the most ruthless people have a deep desire for warmth and love. Tu'anjia's madness and confusion are his reflections and questions of his life, and they are also profound criticisms of power and human nature. His ending is not only the end of his personal destiny, but also an accusation of the cruel reality of that era. The image of Tu'anjia allows the audience to see a person who has lost himself in power and desire. His story is a deep exploration of human nature and a reflection on history.

3. The Profound Entanglement between Love and Justice

In the dance drama "The Orphan of Zhao", the entanglement between love and righteousness is not only reflected between the main characters, but also permeates every detail. The scene of exchanging babies and offering children creates a tense and tragic atmosphere through multiple changes in lighting and scenes. Under the warm yellow and pink-purple lights, the feelings between the Cheng couple become deeper, while the scenes intertwined with blood red and ink black symbolize the approach of evil. Cheng Ying, pale and with Tu Anjia, smashed the child into a river of blood. This scene deeply reveals his inner struggle and sacrifice. The joy of the citizens after getting the child back and their accusations against Cheng Ying further deepened the entanglement between Cheng Ying's small family's love and great justice, allowing the audience to feel the pain and contradictions in the character's heart.

The scene of the coming-of-age ceremony highlights the dramatic conflict in the intense music. Cheng Ying's sacrifice for love, Tu'an Jia's madness for love, and Zhao Wu (Cheng Bo)'s choice between the love of raising a child and the greater good of life and death [6] are all vividly expressed through the subtle changes in dance movements and expressions. The alternation of the main colors of white, yellow, and red not only creates a visual impact, but also symbolizes the transformation of the characters' inner emotions. In the end, the orphan steps on the fallen bodies of the Zhao family under the golden light, accompanied by a sound that seems to tear through the darkness, and moves forward like the rising sun. This scene makes the audience believe that although there are many who have fallen before, there will always be successors. Through the careful design of these

scenes and the delicate expression of emotions, the dance drama conveys a profound theme to the audience: between the light and darkness of human nature, love and sacrifice are eternal themes.

4. Conclusions

The Orphan of Zhao is full of deep entanglements between love and righteousness, which are displayed through the dancers' body emotions, stage lighting and music. The two most serious entanglements are the exchange of babies and the coming-of-age ceremony. The former, through the repeated changes of lighting and scenes, makes the feelings between the Cheng couple more profound under the illumination of warm yellow and pink purple, but as the evil approaches under the interweaving of blood red and ink black, Cheng Ying, who follows the righteousness in his heart, throws the child with the longevity lock into a river of blood with Tu Anjia in a pale state. Later, when the citizens of the city, in addition to the joy of getting the child back, can't help but accuse Cheng Ying of selling out his master for glory, it adds a bit of pain to the previous entanglement between Cheng Ying's small family love and great justice. The latter, however, highlights the dramatic conflict in the intense music, Cheng Ying's sacrifice for love, Tu Anjia's madness for love, Zhao Wu or Cheng Bo's choice between the love of raising and the justice of life and death. In the alternation of white, yellow and red as the main colors, the orphan finally stepped on the fallen bodies of the Zhao family and moved forward like the rising sun under the golden light in the sky, accompanied by the sound that seemed to tear through the darkness. It made me believe that even if there are many who fell before, there will always be successors.

To sum up, the dance drama "The Orphan of Zhao" gets rid of the stereotyped image creation and interweaves the righteousness of "God" with the desire of "human". In addition, the clear sounds of costumes and instruments touching each other during the live performance, the sounds of actors' limbs colliding, and breathing emotions such as sobbing, fear, and sadness further allow the audience to return to that time, be touched by the stories of each orphan, think about the entanglement of emotions, watch many small characters burst out with a vitality close to God, and then think about how our loyalty, righteousness, emotion, and life will be implemented and developed in modern life.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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