

The "Drama" Construction of Modern Poetry: On the Poetic Drama Art of Guo Moruo and Hai Zi

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Abstract: In the process of modern development and transformation, traditional Chinese dramatic literature and poetics have undergone intense upheavals and repeated explorations. Ultimately, this traditional art form, poetic drama, which originated in the classical era, has continuously refined its creative theories and constructed its writing ecosystem, even achieving a new life, following the fluctuations in the intellectual trends and linguistic shifts of "drama" and "poetry." Looking at the Chinese literary scene of the 20th century, the May Fourth Movement and the period following it can be considered the beginning and first peak of modern poetic drama, while the decade or so after the Reform and Opening Up period can be seen as its vigorous revival and second peak. Within these two historical stages, Guo Moruo, imbued with the spirit of the times and the nation, and Hai Zi, who created the romantic "grand poetry" style, are prominent representatives, respectively. A systematic study of their literary and artistic thought and an exploration of their poetic drama texts will be of great significance in enriching the value map of Chinese literature.

Keywords: Chinese poetics; Dramatic literature; Poetic drama art; Cultural thought

Introduction

The concept of poetic drama has a long history. Regardless of the literary lineage in China or the West, classical Chinese poetry generally possessed early, systematic value systems and large-scale art forms. However, modern Chinese poetry, born during a period of unprecedented cultural transformation, possesses a strong sense of change and subversion, while also being heavily influenced by numerous foreign cultures. Therefore, the modern concept of "poetic drama," constructed based on the language of modern poetry, is essentially both a single innovation and development of the "drama" genre, and also a renewal of consciousness and a presentation of cultural characteristics related to "poetry." Focusing on the century-long history of poetic drama in China, Guo Moruo, who took national spirit and social culture as his responsibility, is an indispensable research focus. His participation in and leadership of the May Fourth Movement and the poetic drama field in the 1930s and 1940s can be seen as the beginning of the genre's brilliance. Hai Zi, who fully deconstructed and transcended the general temperament of "Romanticism" and even created a "grand poetry"

scene, was the most brilliant cultural star of the "New Poetry Movement" after the reform and opening up. This period is generally regarded as the golden age of modern Chinese poetry and poetic drama. By delving into the linguistic system, ideological orientation, and aesthetic consciousness of modern poetic drama, we can distinguish the former as the pinnacle of "symbolic" expression that integrates historical information and contemporary sentiments, and the latter as the climax of personal emotional exploration and the shaping of a "mythical" psychological world. Through comparative and echoing intertheoretical analysis, the path of constructing "drama" in modern poetry will gradually emerge.

Poetry or Drama: The Fusion and Recreation of Art

When discussing William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it's natural to bring Wang Shifu's *The Romance of the Western Chamber* to mind. While the West shifted its timeline to the Greek tragic arts represented by Aeschylus and Sophocles, Qu Yuan and Song Yu in the East were accelerating the his-

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torical process by merging and interpreting texts of "poetry" and "drama." From a macro perspective, in the long, broad classical era, the development of poetic and dramatic culture between China and the West, especially between China and continental Europe, exhibited a general correspondence in artistic characteristics and a similarity in the process of consciousness. A more specific analysis reveals that the masters of the Peloponnese peninsula favored the dramatic nature of "drama" to highlight the expressive power of artistic activity, while literati in the Central Plains or Jiangnan region, perhaps due to the semantic advantages of the Chinese language compared to other widely phonetic scripts, placed greater emphasis on the rhythm of "poetry," as well as the exploration of spiritual space and the pursuit of a deeper intellectual world. As Zhu Xi and Chen Di once proposed the concept of "the name of music festival" [1], in order to say that some texts existing in the pre-Qin era had the characteristic of "chaos" in the final chapter, the early Chinese poetic drama took poetry and the "Fu Sao style" as the guide or prototype, and naturally inherited the characteristics of the poetic style structure and language habits. From Qu Yuan, Song Yu and even Jia Yi, the development of Chinese poetic drama has long maintained a development path that is deeply intertwined with poetry and literature or takes it as the main axis. It has successively integrated various literary styles including tales of the strange, parallel prose, miscellaneous words or various kinds of historical materials, and even contained multi-faceted references to the expression methods and creative contexts of art forms such as dance and village opera. After the peak years of poetry and literature in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, due to the vigorous development of dramatic literature, poetic drama finally obtained another rich artistic resource outside of poetry, and was able to take root in a more independent state. Yuan Zaju objectively promoted the effective integration of folk songs and customs in the north and south, and filled the concise poetic language with more elements beyond written language, such as the requirements for singing style, the adjustment of rhyme and tone, and the strong desire for narrative expansion. The gradually flourishing drama takes storytelling, especially the performance of complete stories, as its core purpose. In the interweaving of solo singing, duet singing, chorus singing and narration and recitation, the words of written poetry culture are gradually pushed to lines that are more suitable for live performance and fit the audience, and embark on the path of so-called "living literature" [2]. Poetic drama thus benefited, integrating traditional rhymed aesthetics with a mechanism of expression that simulates real-world communication on the foundation of poetry. In terms of narrative subject, it gradually opened up to the exclusive dominance of abstract or grand spiritual themes, and began to evolve from the "metaphysical" to include products that include the "physical." For example, society, folk customs, and mundane objects began to connect with fate, stars, and sacrifices, and even resonate with them. The poetic handling of the leaping nature of emotional logic also became more and more in line with the

close plot of conventional narratives. In fact, hundreds of years before the beginning of the "New Culture Movement," Chinese poetic drama already had the characteristics of vernacular language.

From the refined elegance of classical poetry, poetic drama has evolved into a new art form capable of encompassing worldly emotions, anxieties about daily life, the love and affection of ordinary people, and the continuation of myths. Beyond being the "inheritor" of poetry, it also assumes the role of the "adopted son" of drama, thus possessing a remarkable tolerance for diverse themes. Whether it's plays like *The Injustice to Dou E* and *Lu Zailang*, which criticize social corruption, or those like *Double Merit* and *Li Ying Carries Thorns*, which celebrate the spirit of heroic resistance, or plays like *The Criminal in the East Window* and *The Orphan of Zhao*, which express simple national sentiments and praise justice, while their presentation often prioritizes character portrayal and stage effects, with an ever-increasing focus on action and visual satisfaction, the concise and symbolic poetic qualities of their script language undeniably remain. Therefore, viewing them as poetic drama within a broader context is not an exaggeration. The poetic dramas that still pursue the poetic language system and lyrical consciousness in detail are more from the integration of historical information by scholars in their study, or the compilation of unofficial histories. Unlike dramas that are entirely aimed at the public and the secular world, this type of poetic drama has more of a Confucian scholar temperament. It is characterized by the exquisite sense of words and the deeper aesthetic taste, which basically created the beginning of the "scholarly" writing of drama literature [3]. The creative group known as the "literary school" in the history of Chinese drama literature was formed at that time. The famous plays such as *"Lichuntang"*, *"Wutongyu"*, *"Hangongqiu"* and *"Laojuntang"* created by Wang Shifu, Zheng Guangzu, Bai Pu and Ma Zhiyuan were regarded as classics throughout the ages. They have long influenced the development of poetic drama style in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and laid the creative experience for works such as *"Peach Blossom Fan"* and *"Peony Pavilion"* that still pay attention to poetic language and thinking even though they have a deep narrative.

The development of Western poetic drama, which is mainly based in Europe, differs from the relationship between the "poetic" and "dramatic" aspects of Chinese poetic drama. In the city-states on the Aegean coast, the prototype of poetic drama, influenced by the performing arts of stage plays, was born in the 5th century BC. Whether the theme was about the humor and revelry of Dionysus, the god of wine, or the reverence and mourning for Prometheus, the ancient Greek theater had a strong atmosphere of performance and interaction, and even had the participation of "choirs". The poetry itself was also more or less influenced by "drama". For example, the Trojan War and Odysseus's wandering in Homer's epics all have the overall manifestation of the chain narrative characteristics. Although the details are generally completed in iambic hexameter, the appli-

cation of "oral tradition" [4] language habits is common. Even though poetic leaps, sublimations, dynamism, or abstract art abound in narrative-driven plots, they always differ from the highly concise and condensed symbolism emphasized in the classical Chinese poetry system. It seems that classical European poetry, especially long poems, naturally possesses a certain dramatic, interpretive artistic gene. The birth and development of poetic drama have largely maintained distinct dramatic techniques, visual tension, and emotional appeal. Roman drama essentially inherited the legacy of ancient Greek poetic drama. The empire propelled a broad range of arts, including poetry, painting, sculpture, and drama, to another peak. For poetic drama, its poetic nature has long faced the erosion and reciprocal influence of hedonistic culture. The seriousness of poetry and its traditional lyrical value have continuously reacted to this, ultimately giving rise to a rich variety of techniques and expressive forms, such as satire. The Middle Ages was a period of relatively slow development for both poetry and dramatic literature. As a symbiotic product of the two, the creation of poetic drama was also relatively stagnant. At that time, the European drama repertoire mainly revolved around two major schools: "religious drama" and "secular drama." The former was subject to the influence of sectarian ideology and the dominance of the papacy, inevitably filled with constraints on innovation, while the latter drove poetic drama to be more folk-oriented and relatable to the masses, laying the experiential foundation for the "Enlightenment drama" of the Renaissance era.

In Germany, Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller emphasized the special mission of drama to "educate people and educate the nation" [5]. He and Pierre-Augustin and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, representing the new school of playwrights, raised the banner of "enlightenment" and basically completed the rescue of the previous era's poetic drama from its stagnation. At the same time, they also profoundly inspired the cultural trend of the 17th century that disagreed with and even surpassed the achievements of the "classical" poetic drama style advocated by Racine, Molière and others. Under the banner of "enlightenment", poetic drama began to move from pure literary creation to a broader field of humanities and social sciences, and even intervened in real social issues and even participated in politics. Just as Bourdieu, who studied dramatic literature theory, proposed the concept of "national language construction" [6], the construction and legitimization of the national common language was completed by the "conspiracy" of writers, grammarians and teachers. Indeed, the development of modern Western poetic drama essentially involves the construction of a cultural value system, moving from linguistic and literary theory to socio-cultural theory, and from the careful consideration of words on paper to a certain realm of literary politics. For centuries after the enlightenment and transformative trends brought about by the Renaissance, Romanticism and Realism became two major sources of thought, deeply intertwined with poetic drama. Such artistic achievements, accompanied by Western colo-

nial activities and cultural exports following the Age of Exploration, gradually spread until they directly encountered the Eastern world. In the mid-to-late 19th and early 20th centuries, Western poetic drama culture, primarily in Europe and America, was gradually moving towards the trend of "symbolism." Simultaneously, the doors of ancient China were being opened, and social systems, cultural psychology, and national spirit were undergoing earth-shattering transformations. In the intense collision of these two cultural systems, Eastern and Western poetic drama ushered in their most important and comprehensive opportunity for convergence and evolution, even leading to the later mutual learning and fusion.

Since modern times, the characteristics of "late-developing and exogenous" in Chinese society and Chinese literature [7] have become more prominent. When the social system, national culture, political order and almost complete knowledge ideology faced subversive impacts, many deeply rooted ideological dogmas and ethical concepts collapsed when foreign values were constantly infiltrated or intruded. As a result, the classical Chinese-centered cultural and literary lineage, as well as the excellent spirit that accounted for a large proportion of traditional thought, inevitably suffered the fate of being implicated in the "Great Criticism" and "Great Revolution" trends. Dramatic literature since ancient times has basically fallen into a period of decline after 1890. Before the reform of new drama and the rise of new generation artists, the obsolescence of the repertoire and the inertia and powerlessness of the creative environment became an objective situation that could not be ignored. The turning point or collapse of poetry is more obvious and thorough. After the 1910s, with the increasing value of vernacular Chinese and the belief of the progressive literati of the new era in the path of reform from literature and culture to society and the nation, poetic texts with regulated verse and classical Chinese as the main axis were easily included in the category of "old culture" criticism. In "The Dramaticization of New Poetry", Yuan Kejia once pointed out that "the only fatal and important part of poetry is the process" [8]. With the continuous launch of all-round criticism and reform activities of old poetry by poets and scholars such as Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Li Jinfeng, and Liu Bannong before and after the May Fourth Movement, the poetic theory and language system inherited from the classical era have been dissected. Although it retains some of its essence, it is obviously no longer able to rely on it to establish a new system of "new poetry".

Therefore, "Western learning" became a cultural resource with both advantages and disadvantages that was close at hand. As early as the mid-to-late 19th century, Liang Qichao, Huang Zunxian and other literati proposed two main development possibilities in the topic of "Poetry Revolution" [9]. One was to move towards popularization, allowing the ideas of poetics and the texts of poetry to permeate from the halls of high culture and the study rooms of scholars into the streets and alleys, and to widely absorb folk themes and folk language; the other was to learn from foreign countries, to

learn from the East Asian culture represented by Japan and the West Asian culture represented by Europe, and to forge a new Chinese poetics system under the policy of breaking the old and establishing the new. Until the mid-to-late 1920s, the changes surrounding "poetry" and "drama" finally became a *fait accompli*. The multifaceted intervention of Western learning values participated in the construction of the core theory of the century-long history of new poetry, and also provided a rich reference blueprint and ideological guidance for the "new life" of modern drama. As a result, modern poetic drama was born. As Thomas Stearns Eliot once said when arguing for the feasibility and necessity of the revival of poetic drama, "compared to prose drama, poetic drama can achieve a high degree of unity between language and emotion on stage" [10]. In the process of the transformation and revival of Chinese poetic drama, many literati in the 1930s paid attention to this issue. Therefore, due to its irreplaceable nature, poetic drama was not abandoned or declined in the Chinese literary world during the great changes. Instead, it received continuous attention and effort after experiencing the pain of transformation. By 1935, with the successive emergence of various schools of thought, after poetics and dramatic literature broke through and completed the major modern transformations, the creative exploration path of poetic drama enjoyed the benefits of the former two and became more mature and stable. The theoretical thought and language system of Chinese new poetry, combined with the performing arts in the field of new drama, and even the resources from the emerging stage plays and film industry in the concessions, continued to carry out the correction and supplementation of poetic drama as a genre. Tian Han, Zhu Xiang, Lin Huiyin, and others can be considered representatives of poetic drama creation at that time. However, if we talk about the generation that combined Chinese and Western elements and drew inspiration from the past and present, the one with the highest achievement and the widest influence is Guo Moruo.

A Turning Point: The Spirit of the Times and Guo Moruo

Before Guo Moruo, whether it was the literary drama of the late Qing Dynasty or the several drama-poetry hybrid texts of the early Republic of China, they could only be regarded as modern poetic dramas under a macro and broad concept. Some of them were either too formulaic and stylized in traditional dramas or indulged in the conventionality of poetic language. What they talked about and referred to neither touched the profound aspects of historical information nor reflected the current society. They were almost art that was detached from reality and a narrow gate that was divorced from the spirit of the times. After Guo Moruo launched *Phoenix Nirvana* and *Goddess Rebirth* in 1921, poetic dramas with modern characteristics, hybrid genes of new and old poetry, openness of new culture and foreign countries, and reflection of old culture and painting were

truly born. This feat of innovating and enlightening the future generation with his talent almost alone made Guo Moruo fully fit the highest evaluation given by Qian Liqun as "a poet and historical playwright who can represent an era in the history of modern literature" [11]. His poetic dramas embody the wisdom of his own in multiple fields, including poetry, drama, archaeology, epigraphy, politics, literary theory, translation, and philosophy. As a literary figure with a wide range of talents and exceptional intelligence, his research on poetic dramas, centered on Guo Moruo, almost unfolds a literary and artistic landscape that presents the spirit of the times from the New Culture Movement until the mid-20th century.

The concepts of "old person" and "new person" are two long-standing characteristics revealed in Guo Moruo's own experiences and his poetic and dramatic texts. The interplay, mutual exclusion, and even fusion between these two aspects became the main driving force behind his lifelong cultural writings and the construction of his ideological system. In his youth, he studied under Shen Huanzhang, reading classics such as the *Classic of Poetry* and *Biographies of Tang Dynasty Talented Scholars* in a mountain retreat, receiving a profound traditional cultural education. His initial values were cultivated within the classical academic atmosphere dominated by Confucianism. Later, in his hometown of Leshan, Guo Moruo experienced the ups and downs of primary school education, where he was admitted and then dropped out. Influenced by democratic ideas in higher primary school, he gradually developed a rebellious and reformist mentality towards his own and his surrounding "old" environment. His participation in the Sichuan official school strike in Chengdu in the following years, as well as his active response to the Xinhai Revolution, were all results of this "new" consciousness. Guo Moruo began studying in Japan in 1914. In the Orient, he witnessed the development of a modern nation after the Meiji Restoration. Within this "new" perspective, he began studying numerous foreign classics and academic ideas, including the names of Rabindranath Tagore and Walt Whitman. From literature to culture, from cultural tradition to politics, his lament for the "old" aspects of China and his desire for change are evident in his writings. At the same time, the so-called "old" never became inextricably linked to Guo Moruo's thought. During his visits and travels in Tokyo, Chiba, Kobe, and Fukuoka, he profoundly discovered the existence of another important intellectual theory besides the "Western learning" that had flourished in recent decades and the old "Dutch learning"—the value of "Sinology." Throughout his life, Guo Moruo's advocacy and development of the "new" was never based on the endless criticism and complete overthrow of the "old." His academic view and attitude towards governance, which sought the best for all and adhered to materialism, were not only derived from the Marxism he later embraced, but also deeply influenced by the "discernment" and "inclusiveness" of classical Chinese literati. During his time abroad, he realized that the "old" and "new" in China could be organically combined, achieving a path of integrated development through

separation and mutual benefit. Therefore, on the one hand, he translated Turgenev's "The New Era" and Kawakami Hajime's "Social Organization and Social Revolution," among other "new" works; on the other hand, he corresponded with Zong Baihua, who was dedicated to the study of Eastern philosophical systems. At his residence at Kyushu Imperial University, he created plays with a strong classical Chinese flavor, such as "Zhuo Wenjun" and the poetry and drama collection "Starry Sky."

Therefore, understanding Guo Moruo's poetic drama and his thoughts can also be done through a structural interpretation using the two concepts of "Chinese" and "Eastern/Western". To this day, when Cao Shunqing was studying the development of Chinese comparative literature, he lamented that "the literary discourse of contemporary China is still based on the Western discourse system" [12]. The initial formation stage of this phenomenon may have been during the time of Guo Moruo. At that time, almost all literary genres and schools inevitably suffered from the infiltration or strong intervention of foreign cultural systems. Many literati gradually fell into the ecological circle shaped by "foreigners" to seek their own positioning, or tried to transform China's modern and contemporary literature and culture with the guidance of imported theories. Guo Moruo was not one of the majority who adhered to the "Chinese" value. In the field of poetic drama, when he could have completed the so-called modern reform of poetic drama by simply translating or imitating various European or American dramas, he was still willing to uphold the protection of ancient Chinese culture and historical information. For Guo Moruo, "foreign" was his skill or his appearance, while "Chinese" was always his core and his inner essence. When recalling his creative journey in the 1910s, he did not shy away from talking about his connection with poetic drama and its inseparable relationship with foreign literature. His statement, such as "I have read some Greek tragedies and the works of Shakespeare, Goethe and others. Needless to say, under their influence, I wanted to try to engage in historical drama or poetic drama" [13] can be described as sincere. At the same time, he and Lu Xun were well-versed in the knowledge of the East and absorbed the ingenuity of the West, and put it into the salvation of traditional Chinese culture and the excellent spirit of the nation. Regarding the two writing forms and narrative theories that have been continuously extended since Faust, namely "dramatic poetry" and "the dramatization of poetry" [14], Guo Moruo's writing, due to his use of national culture and folk culture resources, as well as his favor and loyalty to Chinese philosophical aesthetics and artistic expression, finally formed the idea of exploring "the meaning of the times" from "historical poetic drama", spreading drama from poetry, condensing drama into poetry, and in poetic drama, connecting the carriers of literature and culture of all dynasties such as bamboo slips, memorials, notes, essays, novels, letters, and edicts, forming the grand appearance of modern Chinese poetic drama.

Responsibility is an indispensable element in Guo Moruo's poetic drama lineage. From the beginning of his lit-

erary career, he consciously began to perceive the connotations of different literary works and the value of various art forms. He successively took on the responsibility of academic research or literary creation in the fields of poetry, drama, and exegesis, opening up new paths for writing and clearing up internal and external trends of thought. In the field of poetic drama, he not only deeply understood the creative logic of Hölderlin's so-called "isomorphism between language and existence" [15], but also mobilized his extensive experience and academic scope to effectively mix the characteristics and advantages of various styles and schools. On the relationship between language and existence, he further deduced the combination of language and literature with social change, culture and art and national tradition. Guo Moruo realized early on that audio-visual products such as movies and television programs, as well as various art forms such as drama and modern opera, had a near-fundamental impact on poetic drama, which has a relatively strict audience threshold and a relatively serious and stable appreciation platform. Therefore, just as Karl Heinrich Marx said, "the mode of production of material life determines the process of social and spiritual life as a whole" [16], Guo Moruo, as an important banner of the Chinese Bolshevik literary and artistic cause, has been committed to promoting the transformation and development of the expressive form and artistic connotation of poetic drama in keeping with the times. From the state of having more poetry than drama in the 1920s, to the gradual recovery of the "drama" component during the flourishing period of left-wing culture, Guo Moruo played a pioneering and innovative role in this process. From "Dawn" and "Guanghan Palace" to "The Two Sons of the Lord of Guzhu" and other plays, Guo Moruo used the vigorous emotions and unrestrained poetic sentiments contained in his "ideal poetic drama" [17] as his own call and commitment to the present era.

As for the responsibility of "human beings", Guo Moruo's deep thoughts from the May Fourth Movement to the mid-1930s were reflected in his writings. How to achieve respect for and deconstruction of humanism, and how to combine the so-called revival of humanism in the West with the dream of the rise of ancient China, became the subject of repeated in-depth study. Heidegger once attached great importance to the value of "the origin and materiality of the work of art" [18] in his poetic criticism. In the modern Chinese poetic drama ecology, the so-called "origin" can be flattened to be understood as the combination of the two, the indelible excellent genes in the traditional cultural context, and the democratic and free philosophy that can be regarded as the core of modern thought. The so-called "materiality" can be regarded as the value carried by the genre of poetic drama itself. Guo Moruo's works closely followed or led the passionate dreams of the new generation of youth. The most common content was the chapters that "called for and expressed the modern consciousness of modern people" [19]. He opposed the autocracy and dictatorship in all fields. From the literary and artistic circles to the military and political circles, his iron pen was firm and colorful, and he

brought down countless heroes and talents. At the same time, he advocated freedom and independence. On the path of awakening and humanistic concern, he narrowed and sidelined his own perspective, and chose to get as close to the masses as possible. He used the collective and holistic voice to express the howling or anger of society and the times. In his perspective, the "May Fourth Movement" he personally experienced and the "Sturm und Drang" movement of the Goethe era [20] were the most common content. [] They share many similarities, both being a landmark historical period of transformation from feudal society to modernity. Therefore, in his poetic dramas, Guo Moruo, like Goethe, used the character portrayals in the plays as a representation of the desire for light and individual liberation. In terms of the language of poetic dramas, he used a large number of lyrical long sentences and parallelisms to create a broad artistic realm with a significant sense of rhythm and pause. The emphasis on the value of "life" [21] that unfolded at the same time as literary criticism, philosophical theory, education and history formed an effective reflection or response. Some of the expectations of scholars such as Yu Pingbo and Fu Sinian for the new literary form were presented on Guo Moruo's paper.

Regarding the importance attached to the mission of the times and the sentiment of taking it as one's own responsibility, there was no essential difference between the young Guo Kaizhen and the elderly Guo Moruo. His life, in both written and real dimensions, was both magnificent and undisturbed by honor or disgrace, and his poetic drama is precisely one part of the evidence of this spirit. He participated in the revolution very early. Within the CCP, Guo Moruo's party membership and development experience were more senior than many of the founding generals of the 1955 generation. Moreover, his entry into the core circle of power and onto the historical political stage predated his party membership. As early as 1927, after participating in the preparation of the National Second Sun Yat-sen University, Guo Moruo joined the Guangzhou Nationalist government system. Subsequently, as the deputy director of the General Political Department of the National Revolutionary Army, with the rank of general, he accompanied the Northern Expedition. As a senior political officer in the headquarters, he personally witnessed the formal unification of China and also firmly stood his ground during the most critical "April 12 Incident," engaging in a struggle against the reactionaries in various forms. During this period and in the years that followed, Guo Moruo's poetry dramas and overall literary and artistic creations have seen a clear emphasis on revolutionization and resistance. He clearly understands the main responsibilities of the current era, inspires people during the low ebb of the Great Revolution, and promotes the power of belief in the struggle for democracy. As a "star of the creative world who awakens the deaf and enlightens the blind" [22], he has always maintained a firm stance. He has repeatedly shifted his position between the enticements of various powerful figures and the intervention of political forces in order to seek independence and wisdom. In his po-

etry dramas, he has used increasingly sharp and precise words and plot changes to keep the literary and artistic curtain of the era on the vigorous development of the struggle, and avoid being secretly replaced by the banners of appeasement, compromise or submission.

Since the late 1930s, with the full-scale outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the close connection between the fate of the nation and the fate of individuals, as well as the rise of national consciousness, became the new focus of Guo Moruo's poetic drama art. After abandoning past grievances and setting aside disputes such as positions, the cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party opened the prelude to the full-scale resistance against Japan. Guo Moruo deeply realized that the most critical mission of the times was to awaken and invigorate the national resistance consciousness of saving the nation and mobilizing the literary and artistic circles, along with the masses influencing all levels of society, to join the common historical tide. Just as Dai Jinhua once said that "the 'public text' of the times involves the reproduction of biopolitics and society" [23], Guo Moruo's "public text" represented by his poetic drama is truly experiencing and showing the biggest problems suffered by the political life and production activities of the entire nation at that time. Through works such as *Qu Yuan* and *Tiger Tally*, he broke down the barriers between the poetic drama style and cultural thought system between ancient and modern times, and integrated the artistic characteristics of classical Chinese poetry and painting into modern literary creation, so as to more appropriately reflect the artistic heritage of painting and awaken the historical pride and civilizational confidence of the Chinese nation. In fact, Guo Moruo had tried this idea long ago. When recalling the textual response of "The Flowers of the Pear Tree", Guo Moruo said frankly that "many friends said it was a poem and a painting" [24]. This was precisely his representative plan to renovate and expand the characteristics of traditional art. On the other hand, Guo Moruo continued to promote the deep integration between historical stories and traditional classics with the simple folk consciousness, humanistic freedom and even revolutionary subconsciousness of modernity. The so-called "fresh, pure and simple poetic theory" [25] was injected into the plot and text of the poetic drama characters such as Nie Zheng and Lord Xinling (Wei Wuji).

As a literary genre that has been integrated since its inception, poetic drama has undergone a transformation and rebirth in modern China, and has been developing in a more extensive manner of integration and absorption. Guo Moruo has made many contributions. In addition to the comprehensive progress measures mentioned above concerning the era, politics, culture, and society, he has objectively played an irreplaceable role in the aesthetics of poetic drama, especially in creating new forms of poetic drama aesthetics. In the mid-1940s and later, with the increasingly vigorous growth of a younger group of poets and playwrights, when Qu Yuan's "enlightened understanding of order and chaos" [26] in "Heavenly Questions" began to resonate with Mu

Dan's "the inevitability of human depravity in modern cities" [27] in "Accusation", the main stage in which Guo Moruo dominated the field of poetic drama seemed to gradually come to an end. The history of Chinese new poetry over the past century and the development history of poetic drama in the new era also gradually came to an end. The first "climax" began to tend towards a peaceful, slow or mixed state of new factors. But history does not stand still. Decades later, someone will pick up the great resources contained in the "tension of human and divine exploration and compromise" [28] and eventually push the poetic drama from the relatively common romantic and symbolic ideological box to a freer, more dreamy, lonely and beautiful realm in the late 20th century.

Immortal Words: Hai Zi's Romance and Death

As the peak period of the 20th century Chinese literary history and the century-old history of Chinese new poetry, the more than ten years between the emergence of the "new poetry trend" and the beginning of the "third generation" are full of legend and complex colors. From a macro perspective, the literary and artistic circles, due to the wave of ideological liberation of "reform and opening up", after the pioneering in the political and philosophical fields, have burst out with extremely strong vitality. The vigorous creative enthusiasm has driven the birth of a large number of classic works. Whether it is novels, essays, reportage, or the translation of foreign literature or the field of actively going overseas, there is a feeling that the suppressed talents have finally been released. The general psychology of the academic community is to make up for the "lost decade" [29]. The sudden release of talent, the generally relaxed environment, and the urgency to catch up with the times, combined with these three factors, led to the Chinese literary and art circles entering a new cultural enlightenment period in the 1980s after the "New Enlightenment Movement" [30] in the 1930s. [31] Scholars such as Jin Guantao and Xu Jilin regard the two as a spiritual continuation or cultural extension. Poetry flourished in this atmosphere, with poets such as Shi Zhi, Bei Dao, Yang Lian, and Mang Ke emerging as early talents. Some of them were important members of the underground literary scene who were active during the Cultural Revolution. For example, the poem "Answer," published in the official magazine "Poetry Journal" and the unofficial publication "Today" in 1979, was actually written in early 1976. It has typical "scar literature" attributes and political metaphors. The poem unfolds a cry-like lyricism with the main axis of questioning history, probing the times, and reflecting on human nature. Its language is intense, uplifting, and sharp, and its ideological system has clear non-institutional and non-disciplinary characteristics. Through the form of literature, it calls for the arrival of freedom and reaffirms respect for "humanity". This generation of poets essentially laid the foundation for the works and theories of the "New Poetry

Movement," objectively creating a writing cluster represented by the "Today School." This had a profound impact on young people and a wide-ranging social influence. For older poets and critics like Ai Qing, Cheng Daixi, Ding Li, and Lei Shuyan, who held opposing, resistant, or non-accepting attitudes, it was almost a cultural and intellectual shock. After nearly half a century since the last period of prosperity, a spring of poetics and thought has arrived once again.

At that time, Hai Zi was still a student in academia, gradually coming into contact with poetry in the ivory tower. Apart from translations from abroad and texts from various schools of thought in the early stages of modern Chinese poetry, he was mainly influenced by the "New Poetry Movement," to the point that he became an important writer within it in the following years, and was even regarded by some scholars as a member of the "Today School." But in fact, from his studies at Peking University to his work in the philosophy research department of China University of Political Science and Law, until the publication of "Asian Copper" in 1985, Hai Zi was in the period of his closest relationship with poets such as Bei Dao. His poetic style and his advocated ideology did not show a high degree of integration or imitation of texts such as "The End or the Beginning" and "The Strange Beach," and there was not even much similarity. He had clearly taken a different path. Hai Zi's alienation or unfamiliarity with contemporary politics stemmed from his inner pursuit of metaphysical emotions. While exploring the origins of human nature and constructing his own utopia, he devoted himself to observing and elevating the most basic emotions between people. Love, hate, youth, the sun, and fate occupied a large portion of his poems and essays. Therefore, Hai Zi had no time or intention to develop a critique of history, a lament on the rise and fall of dynasties, or a portrayal and pursuit of "heroes" between the establishment and the anti-establishment. He once said frankly, "It is because of the call of some huge element to me, and also because I have too much to say, these elements and great materials will always burst the shell of my poetry" [32]. Therefore, Hai Zi's writing path is not only different from the poet predecessors or peers who swept the literary world in the late 1970s, but also quite different from his friends and peers who rose from the campus in the early and mid-1980s. Whether it is Luo Yihe and Xi Chuan who have many social interactions, or Zang Di and Xi Du who are from the same school but have little contact (or have never been in contact) at present, Hai Zi's linguistic talent has a mysterious sense of interweaving of images and an ideal utopia constructed by integrating various ideological products, with a high threshold of privacy and a lonely attribute. This also objectively created his relatively independent and unique ecological niche in the poetry world, as well as his "special" creation in the art of poetic drama.

Hai Zi's foray into poetic drama was almost a natural progression. Although the flourishing Chinese poetry scene at the time offered little discussion of poetic drama, with much focus on deliberations and debates over word choice within the framework of common poetic forms, or the exploration

of themes and language in long poems, Hai Zi, driven by the desire to construct his own spiritual space and dissatisfied with merely creating works within the existing long poem structure, valued the revival or innovation of a dramatic art form with the capacity for intellectual interpretation, aiming to create an ideal self-world. Decades had passed since the era of poetic drama pioneered by Guo Moruo, and during that time, only a handful of poetic dramas, such as Yang Mu's *In the Court of History*, existed in the Chinese literary and artistic circles, maintaining a fragile link in development. When Hai Zi began to revisit this path, the difficulty was no less than that of a rebirth. When creating "The Sun: The Beheading Chapter" and "But Water, Water", he made a subversive change to the main writing style of the existing poetic language's "extension" and "intention" [33]. On the basis of inheriting the characteristics of the earlier poetic drama such as the leap of images and the emphasis on narrative, he carried out the most basic reorganization of the texture of language. Unlike the more common romantic lyricism and symbolic mixed writing style held by Guo Moruo, Hai Zi's acquisition of historical materials was quite fragmented. He mixed his own emotions with an incomplete story base and an unsystematic historical background, making it a poetic drama that could both peek at the seemingly nonexistent plot information and make it difficult to capture specific and independent cultural components. The reflection of the spirit of the times and the social landscape occupies a relatively small proportion in Hai Zi's poetic dramas. Within their vast scope are flowing characters, semi-fictional or completely detached from specific historical moments. Classical, modern, postmodern, or anti-romantic characteristics are constantly converging and then amplifying in Hai Zi's hands, like a kaleidoscope, disregarding other complex factors, simply enjoying the opportunities that allow the soul to be placed or elevated during the creation or reading of the poems. This, in turn, reflects an important issue concerning Hai Zi himself and his poetic dramas.

Cleanth Brooks once proposed that "poets can only express truth through paradox" [34]. Perhaps, in certain circumstances, in order to create the characteristics of language and maintain the poetic quality, the exploration and output of so-called truth is presented in a way that contradicts the word order of something or reality. This is a kind of wisdom under "defamiliarization". However, poets cannot rely on "paradox" to survive in real life after leaving the text. The imagination of poetry is prone to exaggerating the situation of reality, including distortion, misreading, transformation or detour. Such art is almost naturally at a certain distance from the real world. The dividing line is the gap between the will to survive and the "Peach Blossom Spring trap". Once crossed, it is easy to lose oneself. Hai Zi's literary career almost completely confirmed this logic. In the blurring of reality and poetic realm, the neglect of ideals and theories, the divergence between poetry and life, and the choice between the times and dreams, it was difficult to make a balanced or normal choice. He was overly fond of the great construction ability of poetic drama, and handed over the many

ills, misfortunes, pains and sorrows of real life to the utopia built on paper to digest. The incomprehension of his family, the fragility of love, and the differences of his peers all contributed to Hai Zi who lacked attention and respect in life. All of this is very different from Hai Zi in poetic drama who wielded language and roared rhetoric and enjoyed a supreme position. Just as he wrote in his diary on November 14, 1987, "I want to become the head of the dragons first" [35], his desire to enjoy the laurel and halo overwhelmed his attachment to reality. Poetic drama is not only a product of the spiritual reflection at the tip of Hai Zi's pen, but it can also be seen as the dependence of his ideological symptoms and the entrustment of his life value. There are two Haizis in the real world and in the world of words, one metaphysical and the other physical. They depend on each other for survival, are inseparable, and are like fire and water, irreconcilable.

From *The Land* to *The Killing*, from reflections on his hometown sparked by the suffering of agricultural civilization to almost sacrificial depictions of tragic conflicts, Hai Zi employs a multifaceted approach in his poetic dramas, constructing a vast cultural construct amidst the multitude of public realities and the value desires of the individual spirit. Overall, he constructs his complete poetic drama art and ideological system through two important paths. Firstly, it is based on mythology as the language root, and it explores the realm of fiction that transcends time, space and characters in general forms. Hai Zi has the appearance of a genius. In his early years, he entered Peking University and came into contact with many domestic and foreign cultures in his academic career and personal exploration. He absorbed the Chinese and Western cultures and the Pauline School, which became an undeniable feature. In the style of poetic drama, one can vaguely see the shadow of ancient Greek tragedy and the writing style of various plays that have emerged in Western Europe since the mid-Renaissance. He is good at using the "field of reference" technique and concept [36], which was originally used to shape the characteristics of the plot in poetic drama, to achieve the decoupling of the overall situation from the specific anchor of reality. On the one hand, it connects with ancient mythology. From the Adriatic Sea to the mountains and rivers of southern Anhui, from the Huanghuai Plain to the Kipchak Grassland, the objects in Hai Zi's writing freely shuttle, ignoring the limitations of geography and culture, and the constraints of time and politics, to build a grand and broad poetic drama artistic conception. On the other hand, in terms of the consciousness dimension of narration and lyricism, he basically carried out the "logic non-relevance" of poetry proposed by Richards [37]. Under the forging and guidance of mythological color, the logic of the human world is no longer fully applicable to the poetic drama. Hai Zi split the flat concept of "world" into the space of hell and heaven. Unlike Mu Dan's writing style in the poetic drama in the 1940s, which drew on religious elements such as Christ, Hai Zi actually did not have an excessive preference for any simple sect, doctrine, or ethical structure. In his paper, apart from himself, everything else can exist as a

third party. Therefore, in "The Sun: The Beheading Chapter", he simultaneously included images such as Xing Tian, Shiva, sorcerer, and lyric poet. In the seemingly unrestrained rich connotations, he repeatedly unfolded themes such as struggle, pain, separation, and silence. Hai Zi's poetic dramas emphasize the interaction of multiple voices. Zhou Hailin once pointed out that compared with Guo Moruo's plays, it further gained new value increments, namely "modernist expressive techniques and modern people's spiritual experience" [38]. But perhaps because of this, in the "experience", Hai Zi gradually moved towards the point of being romantic, hesitant, sentimental and even depressed. The already sensitive literati, in the new ideas he gained in urban life, academic life and work and social life, had a desire to escape that exceeded the sense of satisfaction he had gained. Most of the "great poems" style poetic dramas he finally presented reflected this problem.

Represented by "The Thirteen Anti-Kings Song", Hai Zi created chapters containing "prison", "womb" and even "filthy place" with words such as "blood" and "fire", "knife" and "axe", which almost replaced the image of the lyric poet who preferred "hometown" and "sea" as well as "spring" and "flower" in the public's general memory. But Hai Zi's inner thoughts remained the same. He once talked about his understanding of "great poetry", that is, the concept of "the subject of mankind suddenly entering its own magnificence at a certain moment" [39]. For him, writing about beauty and hatred, chaos and peace is a seemingly opposing textual direction that actually leads to a highly consistent ideological axis. Hai Zi used poetic drama to create a world, launched multiple poetic dramas and connected them with poems, and finally formed a cultural territory of spiritual autonomy. All conflicts, violence, love and absurdity were decided, arranged, established or overthrown by himself as the creator. He enjoyed the right to control the subject matter, language skills, picture arrangement and logical switching of poetry. The person who gave the close-up shot of death can also focus on creating a new plot. Just as Li Zhangbin once noted the characteristics of "Hai Zi's emphasis on self, subjectivity, and will" [40], Hai Zi's early observation and attempt to understand the world, and his attempt to integrate and combine with his own social relationship, gradually transformed into a kind of continuous and almost indelible questioning and resistance. He once lamented or sighed in his writing. In questions such as "Whose life am I living?" [41], which have no immediate answer, the poet gradually fell into unfamiliarity and alienation from reality, which led to a high degree of creative enthusiasm for the few self-proving value or respect-gaining carriers in life, namely poetry and poetic drama. Scholars such as Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler once believed that Romantic poetry was not replaced by modernism or postmodernism, but was reborn in the twentieth century, producing a group of important poets. Looking back at the poetry scene now, we may be able to draw the conclusions of people such as Wallace Stevens and John Ashbery from abroad, and Hai Zi and Zhang Zao, who mixed with the temperament of realism. However, Hai Zi actually

transcended or distorted the category of "romanticism". The state he reached was almost a mixture or binding of primitivism, and even some of the characteristics of Tristan Tzara-style Dadaism. He practiced "qigong" in reality in an attempt to attain enlightenment and sublimate. The so-called "dao" was both a functional "dao" method that he attempted to cultivate in reality that was higher than the physical body, and also filled his poetic drama with the meaning of "heavenly way". From this point of view, Hai Zi was obsessed with traditional culture and even superstitious products. But at the same time, he felt deeply uncomfortable with his own position in the cultural society. When his attempts to pursue the cultural concept that originated from "dao" and the idea of realizing his personal ideals were repeatedly shattered, Hai Zi, as a "temporary lover of material things" [42], also chose to criticize to a certain extent. In most of his writing, he basically created the basic structure of "four concentric circles about villages, land, earth, and homeland" [43], which he regarded as his own literary position and the main foothold of his spiritual world. However, when he fully entered the heroic imaginary space carried by "sun" and "throne", Hai Zi's attachment to "redemption" or "homesickness" was easily diluted by "eternity" and "martyrdom". In the poetic drama, it is difficult to give Hai Zi an accurate research position, just as he never gave himself a safe way out in the real environment, or the courage to survive.

When genius cannot control vast wisdom, that wisdom becomes the first incense ashes offered in its own destruction. For many years, Hai Zi was hailed as a "genius," and he himself held this self-proclaimed genius throughout his life. However, unlike most talented poets of his time, such as Chen Xianfa, who called himself a "Confucian knight-errant," Han Dong, who dared to "pass Bei Dao," and Yang Li, who emphasized the transformative or subversive value of "non-ism," all understood how to return to life amidst the pride or fervor of their youth. They organically combined the imagery of poetry with the values of public society, standing above contradictions rather than on one side of them, achieving a balance and avoiding being devoured by their artistic talent. Hai Zi, on the other hand, ultimately failed to reconcile with reality. From the extreme or abstract scenes in his poetic drama, he moved towards the final chapter of his life. No matter how later "interested people" embellish or embellish the story of a genius's martyrdom, its tragic essence remains unchanged. This is a kind of "confusion of control" [44]. When pushing the art of poetic drama to a new peak, Hai Zi was intoxicated in the world of unrestrained words. He left behind the price of irreversible damage, whether by intention or unconsciousness. The fleeting view of life and death on the paper made the so-called "sacrifice" a shortcut to get rid of the predicament in his subconscious. The grand image of the "hero" crushed the chapters of life of the common people. Hai Zi went from initially entrusting his emotions and driving poetic drama as an expression of personality or a reflection of value orientation, to later being unable to detach himself and beginning to enter the state of "escaping emotions and escaping personality"

[45]. Poetic drama became a cave or refuge of art. In the end, Hai Zi no longer simply wrote and revealed the picture of the "abyss", but walked towards it. He completely lost the ability to control his own talent and was swallowed by the passion and waves he wove himself. The so-called "living towards death" art is essentially a dead end of "dying towards life". In 1989, the year Hai Zi passed away, various schools of poetry were developing vigorously. Many important figures in the "third generation" poetry movement that rose after the "new poetry tide" had contact with Hai Zi. For example, when he went south from Beijing to Chengdu to meet Shang Zhongmin, he was advised that "if becoming a master of a generation requires the price of life, then it is better to choose to live well" [46]. However, Hai Zi at that time seemed unable to accept such advice. They drank together all night at their residence, talking about poetics, feelings, homeland, and dreams. When talking about dreams, the end of death was truly irreversible. In the history of modern and contemporary Chinese poetry drama, Hai Zi's works have become an immortal chapter. In the second half of the 20th century, it seems that no one can match his artistic height and influence. The literati who was judged to be "lacking water in the five elements" [47] in his childhood finally obtained a "life" that flowed like a vast ocean in his poetry drama, leaving behind a number of artistic wonders that are "awake but not yet awake".

Conclusion

Across the century-long trajectory of Chinese modern poetic drama, Guo Moruo and Hai Zi stand as two luminous yet fundamentally different beacons. Their works, emerging from distinct historical junctures—the May Fourth era and the post-Reform "New Poetry Movement" respectively—jointly attest to the vitality of poetic drama as a site where poetry and theatre converge, clash, and regenerate. A systematic comparison of the two not only consolidates the arguments advanced in the preceding sections but also sharpens our understanding of how "drama" constructs "poetry" in the modern Chinese literary imagination.

First, in terms of cultural orientation and intellectual mission, the two poets occupy opposite poles. Guo Moruo's poetic drama is inescapably public and historical. Deeply informed by the spirit of national salvation and social reform, his plays such as *Qu Yuan* and *The Magnolia Blossom* transform the stage into a platform for political indictment and collective catharsis. His "drama" is a call to action, channeling individual lyricism into the service of a nation in crisis. Hai Zi, by contrast, turns radically inward. His poetic drama—exemplified by *Sun · The Beheaded*—deliberately detaches itself from immediate social realities, retreating into myth, metaphysics, and a personal utopia. Where Guo's voice is that of the citizen-prophet addressing the masses, Hai Zi's is that of the solitary visionary conversing with the cosmos.

Second, their approaches to language and form reveal a parallel divergence. Guo Moruo inherits and reinvents classi-

cal Chinese expressiveness, blending it with foreign (especially Romantic and Symbolist) influences to forge a rhetorical language of grandeur and passion. His lines are designed to be declaimed, to move audiences, and to occupy public space. Hai Zi, meanwhile, pursues a "grand poetry" (da shi) that is elliptical, accretive, and ritualistic. His language abandons narrative linearity in favour of mythic recurrence and symbolic density, creating a theatre of the interior rather than the civic.

Third, the relationship between art and life marks their most poignant contrast. For Guo Moruo, poetic drama is ultimately an act of engagement; the self dissolves into history. For Hai Zi, poetic drama becomes an act of transcendence bordering on self-annihilation; the self expands until it collapses under its own metaphysical weight. Both, in their own ways, pushed the boundaries of what poetic drama could express—one by widening its social reach, the other by plumbing the depths of individual consciousness.

In essence, Guo Moruo and Hai Zi represent two complementary answers to the same question: how can poetry become dramatic without ceasing to be poetry? Guo's answer is commitment—to history, to the people, to the urgency of the present. Hai Zi's answer is transfiguration—of the self, of language, of the boundary between life and art. Together, they map the full imaginative terrain of modern Chinese poetic drama: from the public square to the inner sanctum, from the echoes of antiquity to the whispers of the absolute. It is precisely this dual legacy—of social responsibility and lyrical transcendence—that continues to enrich the value map of Chinese literature and to inspire new explorations in the ever-evolving construction of poetic drama.

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