

A Study of Realistic Love View in *Love in a Fallen City*

Yifei Chen*

School of Humanities, Hangzhou Normal University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 311121, China

*Corresponding author: 2021210118027@stu.hznu.edu.cn

Abstract:

Love in a Fallen City is an early work by Eileen Chang, written during the war in Hong Kong. The work describes the tug of war in the relationships between Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan. It is about love, marriage, and human nature. This paper talks about the realistic love view in *Love in a Fallen City* in three parts, the love view shown in the work, and the influence of the author's life experience and the historical background. This paper adds research about why the author's writing style is different from mainstream research about the character image analysis of the work and the comparison between works. The author believes that the love view expressed by Eileen Chang in her works has realistic and sad colors. Eileen Chang uses the detailed portrayal of the protagonist's inner thoughts and behaviors to echo real life. The seemingly happy ending also implies the sadness of the couple's superficial harmony and spiritual separation. At the same time, the content of the work is closely related to the author's own experience. Eileen Chang incorporated her own experiences and the background of the war when creating the protagonist's experience, which makes the content and style of her work extremely realistic. Therefore, it has become one of Eileen Chang's most popular works.

Keywords: *Love in a Fallen City*; Eileen Chang; love view; realistic.

1. Introduction

Love in a Fallen City is a work written by Eileen Chang in the 1940s, which inherits her usual style and has a strong sense of sadness [1]. This short fiction tells the love story between Bai Liusu(B) and Fan Liuyuan (F), which mainly occurred in Shanghai and Hong Kong. During the war, their marriage problems were eventually resolved and B realized the desire to marry F. Although from the results it seems that B got what she wanted, in the author's writing, there is a significant gap between F's attitude and that before marriage. At its core, it remains a realistic work full of detail and pathos.

The "Fallen City" in the work's title foreshadows the outbreak of war later in the article. The "Love" happened precisely because of the war. In reality, the idiom "devastatingly beautiful" is used to describe a person's beauty. However, Eileen Chang's work shows the tragic scene of "Fallen City" and unfolds a realistic and sad picture. The love that arises on this basis is also particularly different. The story of B and F seems ordinary against the backdrop of war but deeply reflects Eileen Chang's reflection on real society, thoughts on human nature, and understanding of love.

At present, most of the research focuses on the analysis of the characters in the work, the comparison of the work with other literary works, the female perspective, and the

interpretation of love from a feminist. For example, Wu Wenjing's interpretation of love in *Love in a Fallen City* from a feminist perspective, attention to the embodiment of women's awakening consciousness in the works [2-5]. In addition, some scholars have also paid attention to Eileen Chang's reflection of herself in the work. For example, Yuan Shaochong's study on *Love in a Fallen City* and Eileen Chang's self-seeking and self-trapping [6].

The purpose of this paper is to delve into the theme of the work, the embodiment of the love view, and the influence on creation, through analysis of the content of the article and exploration of the author's life experience.

2. The Story Theme of Love in a Fallen City

The story theme of *Love in a Fallen City* can be analyzed from many perspectives, including love, marriage, family, human nature, society, etc. The following article will provide a detailed analysis from three perspectives: love, marriage, and family.

2.1 Love

Analyzed from the perspective of love, the origin of B and F's love is not simple but is mixed with complex emotions, conflicts of interest, and revenge. It can be said that the meeting between the two was facilitated by Mrs. Xu. She originally planned to arrange a marriage between Bao

Luo and F, but when Bao Luo met F, she brought B with her, and the two were able to meet. B believes she is ostracized by her family, her mother merely comforted her but offered no practical support. She is left alone to face life. When she met F and danced with him three times, B knew clearly that F did not really like her at that time, and she herself might not like him either. Dancing is just to not let others look down on her. This is the initial appearance of their love, and it cannot be called true love.

In describing their love, Eileen Chang mainly starts with the psychological description of B, portrays a typical female image at that time, and also expresses one of the fundamental reasons why women pursued marriage in that era. At that time, facing the dangers of war, women did not have enough self-protection capabilities. Just like B in the work who was hiding in a panic amid the bombardment of artillery fire, the binding relationship between men and women brought about by marriage was the best option that women could pursue.

The love between B and F is mixed with too many complicated factors. Both parties have their own goals and interests, as well as their own self-esteem and stubbornness. B did not want to be a mistress, and F did not want to get married. The confrontation between the two made this love not so beautiful and happy. However, during the war, this love became their last support. They rely on each other and accompany each other behind the broken walls. The two selfish people felt the resonance of souls and the compatibility of spirits in the midst of displacement, and pure emotions were born in troubled times. In the end, the two came together because of their interactions during the war. It is due to love and companionship. This sincere and tragic love born in troubled times is exactly what Eileen Chang praises [7].

2.2 Marriage

Analyzed from the perspective of marriage, B once experienced a marriage that broke down due to domestic violence. The second marriage with F was also not motivated by love at the beginning but was for the purpose of economic status. Without economic status, one cannot survive. This is why B wants to get married to F. Faced with an unknown future, B is willing to bet her own future on F. However, F always avoided the question about marriage when facing B. He only wanted B to be his mistress but did not want to marry her. He had close contact with B in front of others, but never gave her any commitment. He just enjoyed the ambiguous relationship between them and the intimacy in the eyes of others.

The two protagonists also have different attitudes towards marriage. B has a relatively conservative view on marriage and believes that marriage is the end of love.

However, she has no control over the decision-making of her marriage and is in a passive position. In the process of seeking marriage with F, B has always longed for marriage. Although B is in agony, she does not speak up. She is anxious but helpless about F's indifference. F does not take marriage seriously. His identity as an illegitimate child and his experience of being hated by the Fan family cast a shadow on his ideas, which makes him believe that marriage is a form of long-term prostitution. However, even with such a contemptuous attitude, F still holds the dominant position on the issue of marriage between the two. The marriage relationship will survive or die only on his whim.

The marriage between B and F is based on material interests and is constrained by power and institutions. B's desire for material life was the basis for the two people to meet in the beginning. F's economic status and social system constrained the development of their intimate relationship and the conclusion of their marriage to a certain extent. Through her description of their marriage, Eileen Chang questions the unequal status of men and women in the marriage system and affirms the priority of material desires and survival needs in people's behavior. At the same time, she also calls on women to wake up and fight independently.

2.3 Family

Analyzed from the perspective of family, In the work *Love in a Fallen City*, Eileen Chang describes many families. For example, there is the family of Bai Mansion where B lives, there is the family of F, there is Princess Saheyini's family, Mrs. Xu's family, and A Li's family, and finally, there is the family of B and F.

Eileen Chang mainly describes B's family. The relatives in Bai Mansion have different but very similar attitudes towards the divorced B. There are the third master and fourth aunt who express their dissatisfaction with her directly, as well as the mother who is vague, and the fourth master who does not participate. Although they are all B's relatives, they all fail to give her the warmth of family love. Instead, they brought her endless pain and oppression. The truth was that the money B brought back after the divorce was used up, but her so-called relatives turned around and said that she spent their money on food and accommodation in Bai Mansion. F's family is also described in detail. His father is a famous ethnic Chinese, but F himself is an illegitimate child. He was hated by the Fan family and also did not receive the warmth of family love.

Both families brought unfortunate fates to the two protagonists. At the same time, this also indirectly reflects the tragedy caused by feudal patriarchy in the context of the

times. In a society and family ruled by the Three Bonds and Five Constant Virtues family affection seems particularly weak and ethereal [8]. “Don’t always use the law to bluff people! The law can be changed today and tomorrow, but the principles of nature and humanity, the Three Bonds and the Five Constant Virtues, cannot be changed! [1]” From what Bai Sanye said, people can clearly feel that the society at that time was still in a feudal and backward state of mind. The existence of laws is not as important as the Three Bonds and Five Constant Virtues to the people in the feudal family Bai Mansion.

The families of Princess Saheini, Mrs. Xu, and A Li were only briefly mentioned in the article. Compared with the families mentioned above, the family finally formed by B and F may truly reflect Eileen Chang’s inner desire. When the war came, B and F finally formed a family. They depended on each other in the war. Two selfish people began to consider each other sincerely. At this moment, two people who are not related by blood actually showed warmth that far exceeded what relatives could give. This may be the warmth of family affection that the author longed for. The pain of the family environment is another important source of sadness in the article. It not only reflects the potential influence of Eileen Chang’s own family but also reflects the backward and ignorant families in the society at that time. The warmth of family has become an empty fantasy in a turbulent society, and the status of women in the family is also empty and insignificant.

3. The Embodiment of Love View in Love in a Fallen City

3.1 Realistic and Sad Love

The love between B and F is based on B’s pursuit of economic status and F’s pursuit of excitement. There was no pure mutual attraction between them. Their love is practical. Before the war came, in the extreme push and pull of their relationship, F’s intimacy in front of outsiders and B’s attempt to escape the real difficulties and oppression through marriage are particularly prominent. However, when the war came, all this turned into nothing. When they were alone with each other, they felt each other’s true existence and value. When they are alone with each other, they begin to worry about each other and consider each other.

Their love is also miserable. B suffered humiliation in Bai Mansion and met F in a difficult situation. In this situation, B wants to gamble on her future and rely on F’s finances to get a sense of security. However, after getting married, B was still in a weak position in the marriage, with no economic strength. In Eileen Chang’s eyes, the basis for marriage and even love comes from the economy

[7]. Women pursue love in order to gain economic status and survive. In fact, this love is also mixed with money and calculations and is far from being as pure as the title of the work sounds.

Eileen Chang’s portrayal of the push and pull between the two people’s love is particularly delicate and realistic. This goes beyond the illusory beauty and reveals the problems in love that one will face in real life, with a distinct sense of realism.

3.2 Complex and Purposeful Love

B left Shanghai for Hong Kong with the intention of marrying F. F wanted B to become his mistress and coaxed her. The so-called love between the two people has a strong sense of purpose. Getting married is B’s main goal. For this reason, she can go to Hong Kong with Mrs. Xu to have a love game. She coaxed F and served him carefully. Yet when she found that this goal might not be achieved, she could decisively return to the Bai Mansion to reject F, even if she finally broke up with the family.

B’s behavior that reality is more important than love is extremely realistic. All her considerations are based on seeking a future for herself. B was unwilling to go out to work after losing his financial resources, but it was obvious that she could not sustain this for long. Going to Hong Kong again was B’s compromise. She still went there for economic support. Women under the constraints of feudal society are in many cases unable to stay with their true love. The only thing they can and must pursue is money [9].

In Eileen Chang’s writing, the purposefulness in love highlights the selfishness and egoism of human nature and is more suitable for expressing the complexity of human nature in reality than selfless dedication.

3.3 No True Equality in Love

During the time B was living with F in Hong Kong, she had no financial or status support, so she did not have enough confidence to resist or fight back against some of F’s actions. When B and F first met, they were not in an equal relationship. In the eyes of the world, the divorced B is not worthy of F. In fact, F liked B not entirely because of B’s beauty. Although he is a “new-style person”, he likes old-style, submissive, “real Chinese women” like B [1]. What he likes is B, who is obedient and considerate to him. What he likes is B, who is bound by traditional Chinese concepts. This is essentially an unequal love.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the relationship between the two people directly depends on whether F loves B. All B cares about is the marriage between the two. She is just trying to gain economic status to continue living. Equality itself has been a topic that has been dis-

cussed for a long time in real life. Eileen Chang, from the perspective of love, reflects the imbalance in the status of men and women in the continuation of marriage and relationships.

4. The Influence of Life Experience and the Historical Background on the Writing of Love in a Fallen City

The experiences of B and F are similar to Eileen Chang's life experience. B returned to Bai Mansion after the divorce but did not receive any affection and care from her family. This corresponds to Eileen Chang's own unfortunate original family. Her family consists of a Western-style mother and a completely "old-style Chinese" father. Eileen Chang lost her comfortable life due to her parents' divorce and her father's remarriage. She was forced to live with her biological mother, but the economic pressure caused the relationship between mother and daughter to become increasingly distant [6]. Bai Mansion has a relatively good social status in the article. Corresponding to this is Eileen Chang's originally illustrious old family background. The decline of her family background, the aristocratic education she received in a wealthy family, and the ups and downs of her parent's divorce has given Eileen Chang a sense of desolation in her life and creation [10]. Eileen Chang experienced the pain of family affection in her childhood, and this pain is also reflected in *Love in a Fallen City*.

B's experience can almost be similar to Eileen Chang's life, while the similarities that F carries are more reflected in the spiritual aspect. F returned to China from abroad, only to find that everyone around him was wearing masks and "pretending" to be with him. He followed suit, no one could really confide in him. Even when he returned to his homeland, he still felt lonely and wandering. "I don't understand myself - but I want you to understand me! I want you to understand me [1]!" His confession to B better reflects his own brokenness and sense of inadequacy. Similar to Eileen Chang's experience of leaving her miserable family and wandering in Hong Kong, He had no place to belong and found it difficult to fit in.

In the 1940s, Hong Kong fell into war, which was also a disaster for Eileen Chang. She went to Hong Kong for her studies, but the war destroyed her possibility of completing her education. This is undoubtedly a heavy setback. This war also became the background of *Love in a Fallen City*. It not only broke the delicate balance between B and F but also eventually led to their marriage. With the city on the verge of destruction, they can only rely on and hug each other.

The love story between B and F in the novel also has sub-

tle similarities with the love story between Eileen Chang and Hu Lancheng in reality. The similarities include the war-torn background, the age difference between the two, the sensitivity of B and Eileen Chang, the humor of F and Hu Lancheng, etc [11].

Eileen Chang's own experience had a profound influence on her creation of *Love in a Fallen City*. The two protagonists have both practical and spiritual similarities, reflecting Eileen Chang's personal sense of reflection. The background of the story is also closely related to Eileen Chang's experience. It can be said that Eileen Chang's childhood experience without much family affection, and her hard life in a time of displacement and war have shaped her realistic view of love. At the same time, it also shaped this work. Incorporating life experiences into creation can not only implicitly express one's sad past, but also more naturally express a sense of coldness and desolation [9].

5. Conclusion

Love in a Fallen City fully reflects the reflection of Eileen Chang's personal experience when she was deeply involved in the creation, in terms of the tortuous love between B and F and the Hong Kong War. Through the protagonist's love story, the work expresses the author's praise for sincere and tragic love. It also expresses resistance to the reality of inequality between men and women, and at the same time exposes the indifference of feudal family kinship in the social context of the time. By using delicate psychological description and the method of integrating typical images with reality, Eileen Chang constructs her tragic realistic view of love in the article. Love is portrayed in the work as realistic and sad, complex and purposeful, and there is no real equality. Through the depiction of human details and the interweaving of real events, the author skillfully incorporates his own experiences and emotions. This makes the scene more real and gives the work a unique realistic and tragic style. The work features both delicate portrayals and rich artistic techniques, reflecting Eileen Chang's consistent style. The interweaving of war and love makes *Love in a Fallen City* an important expression of Eileen Chang's profound insight into human nature and her attitude toward love and reality. It has therefore become one of her most popular works. This paper studies the themes in *Love in a Fallen City* and the realistic view of love formed by Eileen Chang under the influence of her own experience, which provides some ideas for future research on the formation of Eileen Chang's realistic view of love.

References

- [1] Eileen Chang. *Love in a Fallen City*[M]. Beijing, Beijing October Literature and Art Publishing House, 2019.
- [2] Tong Enqi. The Real Women——A Comparative Study of Female Images in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Love in a Fallen City*[J]. *Appreciation of Yangtze River Novels*, 2024(05):52-56.
- [3] Xu Jialu. A comparison of the concept of female survival in *Love in a Fallen City* and *Runaway*——Taking the feminist characteristics of Bai Liusu and Kara as an example[J]. *Literary and Art Weekly*, 2023(14):14-17.
- [4] He Yining, Wu Chunyan. A love tragedy in war: A comparative analysis of the female characters in *Love in a Fallen City* and *The Everlasting Regret*[J]. *Masterpieces Appreciation*, 2022(35):106-108.
- [5] Wu Wenjing. A feminist interpretation of love in Eileen Chang's novel *Love in a Fallen City*[J]. *Journal of Qiqihar Teachers College*, 2022(02):58-59.
- [6] Yuan Shaochong. A Study on *Love in a Fallen City* and Eileen Chang's Self-Search and Self-Trapping[J]. *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, 2019(04):180-197.
- [7] Zou Zhiqiang. An exploration of the concept of love in Eileen Chang's novel *Love in a Fallen City*[J]. *New Chu Culture*, 2023(23):28-30+34.
- [8] Zhao Lijing. The Character Image and Life Interpretation of Bai Liusu in *Love in a Fallen City*[J]. *New documentary*, 2021,(23):16-18.
- [9] Gao Zexuan. Coldness is the desolation in the bones——On the tragic women in Eileen Chang's works[J]. *Popular Literature*, 2023, (16):7-9.
- [10] Dong Xiaoping. *Eileen Chang Fiction and Psychological Realism Writing*[D]. Jilin University, 2019.
- [11] Sun Jiyue. A brief analysis of the tragic meaning and origin of *Love in a Fallen City*[J]. *Chinese, Mathematics and Foreign Languages Learning (First half of high school edition)*, 2021,(12):18-20.