

A Brief Analysis of Dramatic Tension and Musical Elements in "Rouge et Noir"

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Abstract: The French musical "Rouge et Noir" has received high praise from the media in China in recent years and its popularity continues to grow. The musical cleverly combines the theoretical framework of musical narratology and dramatic semiotics, with rock music elements as the core, the integration of classical harmony, diversified vocal singing and pop elements as embellishments, which brilliantly reconstructs the dramatic tension of Stendhal's original work and provides a new "French paradigm" for the modern musical transformation model of classic literary works.

Keywords: Musical Theater Elements; Dramatic Tension; Stendhal; Rouge et Noir; French Paradigm

1. Introduction

The premiere of "Rouge et Noir: L'Opéra Rock" in Paris in 2016 interprets Stendhal's critical realist masterpiece "Rouge et Noir" in the context of rock music, breaking the aesthetic boundaries of traditional musicals. The play has been viewed over 280 million times on its official YouTube channel. It premiered in Asia in 2019 and performed 46 times in five cities in China, attracting more than 70,000 viewers. As of today in 2025, it continues to attract attention and countless Chinese drama fans, triggering academic exploration of the modern translation of classic literature[1]. The musical "Rock Red and Black" uses French rock style to construct the love, hatred and hatred of the male protagonist Julien during the Bourbon Restoration period, and vividly brings the style of 19th century French society to the stage. The performance restores the original work's exploration of profound themes such as social class, love, and ambition. While enjoying the musical, the audience can also appreciate the charm of classic literature[2]. The music is mainly rock music, supplemented by various

musical elements, presenting the story of the 19th century French Bourbon Restoration period in the form of modern 3D multimedia stage and modern pop rock music. The stage design carefully recreates the social scenes of France in the 19th century, from the magnificent palace to the impoverished countryside. The scene transitions are natural and smooth, and the clever use of lighting effects adds a lot to the plot. The perfect atmosphere is created in different scenes, giving the audience a grand audio-visual experience [3].

2. From Stendhal to the Rock Stage: the Reappearance of Stories and Characters

Stendhal (January 23, 1783-March 23, 1842), whose real name is Marie-Henri Bayle, was an outstanding French critical realist writer in the 19th century and the founder of critical realist literature. His representative works include *On Love*, *Racine and Shakespeare*, and *The Red and the Black*. Stendhal's works reflect the spiritual outlook of French society during the French Revolution. He is good at psychological description and is the first novelist in the world to consciously use psychological analysis. He created the tradition of introverted realism and laid the foundation for the development of modern novels[4]. *Rock and Roll: The Red and the Black* is directed by François Choquet and Laurent Seroussi, who have directed many well-known musicals, such as *Rock and Roll*, *Mozart*, *King Arthur*, and *1789, Lovers of the Bastille*. The screenwriter Alexandre Bonstein has a profound literary foundation and rich creative experience. Under his screenwriting, *The Red and the Black* is both faithful to the original and innovative. The starring actors include Com, Helene, and Jean Launay, all of whom are outstanding young actors.

The protagonist of the story, Julien, is the son of a carpenter. He was born in poverty but is handsome. He is ambitious and eager to cross the class and become a celebrity. With his proficiency in Latin, he got the opportunity to be

a tutor in the mayor's house and fell in love with the mayor's wife Louise. Louise advocates freedom in her heart, but she is bound by the vulgar and shallow mayor because of marriage. The appearance of Julien ignites her inner desire, and the relationship between the two quickly heats up, but the relationship is exposed soon after. Julien is forced to work as a secretary in the Marquis's mansion. The Marquis's daughter Mathilde is hot and cold towards Julien, which makes Julien uneasy, but he eventually wins Mathilde's heart and makes her pregnant. But the church designed Louise to write a letter to expose Julien, which ruined Julien's future. Julien was arrested and imprisoned after shooting Louise in anger. The proud Mathilde ran around to get her husband out of prison, and Louise, who still loved Julien, also secretly protected him. Julien reviewed his life in prison, refused to appeal, and finally accepted the death penalty. Mathilde buried Julien's head with her own hands, and Louise died three days later. The play, in the style of French rock, shows the social contradictions and conflicts during the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty, as well as the fierce clash between Julien's ambition, love, and social class. At the same time, through the detailed portrayal of the emotional entanglements of the main characters, it vividly presents the tragic fate of the characters of that era [5].

3. The Embodiment of Dramatic Tension and Musical Elements

The dual construction dimensions of tension:

At the text level, Eugène Vinaver's dramatic conflict theory (using "sudden turn" and "discovery" as the structural expression of conflict, forming the soul of the plot) (this conflict precisely constitutes the dramatic tension in the play - derived from the confrontation between the character's will and the social structure) "Conflict" promotes the dynamic mechanism of the development of the plot, and the "universal meaning" therein reflects the internal contradictions of the spirit of the times [6]. The musical level conforms to Jean-Jacques Nattiez's musical semiotics, and the noise characteristics of rock music can deconstruct the aesthetic expectations of traditional drama. The music generally uses powerful metal five-chords to disintegrate the pitch organization, abandon the traditional harmonic logic to promote the development of

the plot, and create a sense of auditory oppression; the fragmentation of rhythm can effectively dissolve the linear narrative of traditional drama music and provide a sense of "detachment"; the extreme timbre can challenge the basic paradigm of traditional music drama performance. The noise characteristics of rock music constitute a semiotic resistance to the aesthetic hegemony of traditional drama under the framework of Nattiez semiotics. This resistance is not only an innovation of musical form, but also a challenge to the cultural power structure - by rationalizing noise, it successfully deconstructs the symbolic monopoly of drama as "high art". Today, this noise Qc aesthetics still maintains its critical edge, reminding us that aesthetic revolution always begins with the destruction and reconstruction of the existing symbol system [7].

The musical elements of "Rock Red and Black" are rich and diverse, mainly reflected in:

Rock elements: As a rock musical, rock elements are the core of the play. The strong drum beats set the exciting tone for the music. The powerful drum beats not only enhance the rhythm of the music, but also create a tense and exciting atmosphere in key plots and passages. For example, in the passage where Julien expresses his ambition and fights against fate, the drum beats strongly highlight his inner passion and struggle. Electric guitar performance is also an important element. Through distortion, overload and other effects, and through powerful melodies and cadenzas, it can express the anger and rebellious emotions of the characters. For example, when expressing Julien's dissatisfaction with social injustice, the sharp tone of the electric guitar can well convey this emotion. It can also create an atmosphere full of power and passion, allowing the audience to feel the charm of rock music[8].

Classical elements: The music cleverly incorporates French classical elements from the 19th century. In the direction of some melodies and the use of harmony, the "French" classical music style is used to make the music elegant and solemn. For example, in some passages that depict aristocratic life scenes or important emotional transitions, common harmonic progressions in classical music are used, making the audience feel as if they were in the French society of that era. The use of symphonic music also adds a classical atmosphere. For example, in some lyrical passages, the melodious and

delicate timbre of string music adds depth and layering to the emotional expression of the characters. When the atmosphere is solemn or heavy, powerful wind music will better set the stage for the atmosphere and make the music more appealing[9].

Popular elements: The integration of popular elements makes the melody simple and easy to remember, and has a strong singing appeal. In songs such as "Glory Surrenders to Me" and "Ding Dong", the chorus of the melody is catchy, allowing the audience to easily hum these melodies after enjoying the performance. The band also demonstrated common arrangements and production techniques of pop music in its performance, such as the rhythm of modern pop music and electronic sound processing, so that the music has both the passion of rock and the fashion sense of pop music, and can better cater to the aesthetic needs of contemporary audiences[10].

Diversified vocal singing: The actors' singing styles are rich and varied, integrating different singing styles such as rock, pop and classical. The singer of Julien (Comeau) often uses rock-style singing. The powerful voice and explosive singing better show Julien's ambition, passion and struggle against fate; while the actor who plays Madame de Renal (Irene) uses a more gentle and delicate pop singing style to express the character's inner emotional struggle and desire for love; in some chorus sections, classical vocal singing is also added to make the chorus more full and harmonious, enhancing the layering and expressiveness of the music. The interweaving of different singing styles of the actors makes the character image more three-dimensional and the music more colorful [11].

4. Conclusion

This paper briefly analyzes the musical elements and dramatic tension of *Rock Red and Black*, and provides a theoretical reference for the cross-media narrative of classical literature. This "deconstruction-reconstruction" model may give rise to more diversified dramatic expression forms, and the success of *Rock Red and Black* also provides us with an excellent "French

paradigm" [12].

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