

## From the Roses of Divine Comedy and the Orchids of Li Sao, Analyze the Exiles' Poetic Return by Expressing Emotions through Flowers

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**Abstract:** In the history of world literature, Dante and Qu Yuan are monuments of their respective cultures. Both of them were exiled in their political career, and both of them were full of deep feelings for nature, secular society and religion. They use their poet's natural disposition and intelligence to feel lives around them, even flowers and trees. In Divine Comedy, Dante often regards the roses as objects. While in Li Sao, Qu Yuan often relies on the orchids. By this way, they express inner feelings and return to spiritual homeland.

### 1. Introduction

People in the world, in addition to paying attention to their own lives, will naturally feel other lives. The poet's feelings are often more delicate and sensitive than ordinary people's, and are easier to be strong. Therefore, even the silent plants are easy to arouse his poetic sentiments. For the poet who has suffered setbacks, this kind of poetic sentiments so has a unique connotation because of their disappointment. Dante and Qu Yuan are both important poets in the history of literature for their own country, and they are also frustrated politicians in exile. What do natural flowers look like in their eyes, and what kind of feelings do they express by the contact with flowers? What is the significance of such expression for them and even for individuals in the general sense?

### 2. The Poetic Feeling of Flowers Belongs to Nature

As poets, Qu Yuan and Dante, even though they are exiled and suffered, their poetic hearts that never stop experiencing and growing could express their deep feelings for nature by flowers such as the rose and the orchid.

In Dante's Divine Comedy, the image of rose appears repeatedly. Rose, a deciduous shrub of Rosaceae, Rosaceae, has many needles on its branches, odd pinnate compound leaves, 5-9 leaflets, oval shape and edge thorns. The petals are obovate, from double petals to semi double petals. The flowers are mostly bright red, purplish red, rouge pink, goose yellow and snow white, and the flowering period is only once a year<sup>[1]</sup>. With soft touch and fragrant smell, the branches are soft, drooping and densely thorny<sup>[2]</sup>, which makes the admirers pay the price of bleeding for their infatuation.

Dante writes in Divine Comedy that "because I have seen roses, all winter long, covered with thorns, hard and untouchable, and then blossoming out attractive flowers."<sup>[3]</sup> Dante simply and concretely describes the rose here, and puts it in the nature to appreciate -- "hard" is the resistance of the rose, which makes the poet far away from itself, and let the poet can't get what he wants; And "alluring" is the call of rose, which leads the poet to get closer and closer, so that the poet can nearly get what he wants. Roses give people sensory enjoyment, but also give people emotional ups and downs.

Facing the masterpiece of nature like rose, Dante, whose heart is as poetic as Qu Yuan, will be more sensitive to her beauty than ordinary people, and then sprout praise for the creator, and can not contain the rush of love for nature. In the eleventh song of Divine Comedy's Inferno, Dante, by Virgil's words, expresses the absolute passion and admiration to nature: "Philosophy has pointed

out to the people who study it many times how nature can learn its own laws from divine intellect and creation. If you study Physics carefully, you will soon read - your art should imitate nature as much as possible just as students follow teachers.<sup>[4]</sup>

In Qu Yuan's *Li Sao*, the attachment and yearning for nature given birth partly by flowers and trees also shows between the lines. The density of herbs, flowers and trees used in *Li Sao* is much higher than that in *Divine Comedy*. There are 18 kinds of herbs: orchid, osmanthus, angelica, chrysanthemum, water caltrop, lotus, gracilaria, wild ginger, cottonrose hibiscus, etc. Among the herbs, orchid is the most common, with a total of 7 places in the book. Orchid, also known as cymbidium, is an epiphytic or terrestrial herb with several or more leaves, banded or rarely oblanceolate to narrowly elliptic, with joints. Racemes with several or more flowers<sup>[5]</sup>, the colors are rice white, crescent white, blackish green, malachite green, apricot yellow, tartrazine, etc.

In *Divine Comedy*, for rose, Dante just stays in the level of appreciation, while Qu Yuan does more than appreciate. He wears orchids and often let them accompany his side. Orchid grows in the natural mountains and rivers. The natural spirit cultivates the feelings of poetry, and the inner closeness to nature endows the poet with surging imagination. In *Li Sao*, the protagonist's original dress and adornment is "I put the sweet-smelling *Gracilaria confervoides* and the *Angelica dahurica* with a delicate fragrance on my shoulders, make a cluster of the autumn orchids, and wear it on my waist."<sup>[6]</sup> The autumn orchid here is the orchid.

The orchid that can be worn in *Li Sao* is different from the jade pendant in Zhou Dynasty.<sup>[7]</sup> "Make a cluster of the autumn orchids and wear it on my waist" is rooted in Qu Yuan's hometown Chu's worship of vanilla flowers and trees and its conversion to natural spirit. Chu people's orchid ornaments are not put into a small sack after getting dry, but picked from the branches and tied directly to the body.<sup>[8]</sup> In the intimacy with nature, this action conveys the retrospection of the original vitality.

Not only does he cling to the autumn orchid, the poet's yearning for nature also makes the autumn orchid's compatriots become the favorites under his pen, "I want to cut the fragrant lotus into upper garment and weave the lower garment with beautiful cottonrose hibiscus."<sup>[9]</sup> The *Gracilaria confervoides* and the leaves of water caltrop are blackish green; orchid is with green leaf and purple stem; the *Angelica dahurica* is light white, and the lotus is bright red. Green, purple, white and red are all taken from nature, and natural color is the basic tone of the lyric protagonist's clothing, which makes the feelings of *Li Sao* full of the romantic atmosphere of nature and return to the pure and simple authenticity in the deep love for nature.

### 3. The Poetic Feeling of Flowers Belongs to Secular Society

Whether Dante or Qu Yuan, as the identity of an exile, still give secular life the same love as nature mother. And their secular feelings are different from each other in rose and orchid.

Taste the rose in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, "As regards the rose, because of its complex symmetry, its softness, the variety of its colors, and the fact that it flowers in spring, it appears in nearly all mystical traditions as a symbol, metaphor, allegory, or simile for freshness, youth, feminine grace, and beauty in general."<sup>[10]</sup> The secular emotion embodied in rose is Dante's erotic feeling that pays attention to perceptual experience, which is deeply influenced by Catholic tradition because of Dante's medieval background.

Appreciating the orchid in Qu Yuan's *Li Sao*, Yi Wang says in the Preface of the Classic of *Li Sao*, the Chapter of *Chuci*: "The tradition of Bixing ("Bi" is analogy, which is a metaphor or simile for people or things to make its characteristics more distinct and prominent) "Xing" is inspiration, that is, to use other things as the beginning of poetry, in order to give rise to the content to be sung.) in the Book of Songs has been further developed in *Li Sao*, and analogy is the most prominent. So good birds and fragrant plants are used to match up with loyal and chaste person of virtue, while bad birds and malodorous objects are used to match up with treacherous and disorderly people" Heling Zhu's *Yuan Minor Anthologies* also says that "beauty is given to compare the king, and herbs is given to compare the gentleman." The secular emotion of orchid is Qu Yuan's moral sentiment which emphasizes the cultivation of oneself and the rule of peace.

The description of rose is often found in the *Paradise* of *Divine Comedy*. Dante writes, "Like this, these two floral hoops made of those roses that never fade revolve around us. Like this, the outer ring echoes with the inner ring."<sup>[11]</sup> The roses here, as Eco says, as a symbol of metaphor for the tender beauty of women, it sets off a poem in the mutual reflection with the fairy, which is the general object for men to place their love.

"Beautiful garden that has become a place with a profusion of colour. There are roses over there."<sup>[12]</sup> Rose has become a part of the colorful garden, and together with lily and other flowers and trees to create a whole harmony. The excellent use of the aesthetic impression of rose's softness shows Dante's unique emotional experience by placing the poet's perceptive mind in the world of flowers and trees that doesn't have emotion. This kind of extension that puts emotion into flowers is similar to the personification of vanilla orchid in Qu Yuan's works.

"From the yellow heart of the eternal rose, the petals spread out circle by circle, emitting the fragrance of praise for the sun that make the eternal spring, Beatrice lead me to watch."<sup>[13]</sup> In *Divine Comedy*, Dante is permeated by the traditional Christian moral concepts, and regards his lifelong beloved girl, Beatrice, as an angel sent to the world by God to enlighten his soul. The guidance of lovers and the fragrance of roses complement each other, pointing to the purification of the soul. There is a similar agreement of the romantic color between here and Qu Yuan's "vanilla herbs - beauty" analogy. Secular erotic feeling and love are placed in the paradise, but the paradise "can no longer have people's emotional waves and nostalgia for secular life"<sup>[14]</sup>. The contradictions and conflicts of emotional experience are subtly contained in the rose and other images, giving readers endless space for literary reverie and exploration.

Looking back at Qu Yuan. In *Li Sao*, his secular feelings are in perfect harmony with his life pursuit of self-cultivation and ruling the country. His orchid has nothing to do with erotic feeling or love. First of all, it refers to virtue. Orchid has simple but elegant bearing, dignified appearance, delicate fragrance pure, fresh and diffused widely. Qu Yuan cultivates the orchid, absorbs its fragrance, and takes orchid's noble and lofty character as the standard of conduct and imitation. "I have cultivated a lot of spring orchid."<sup>[15]</sup> Even if himself is exiled, he also plants orchid, and persists in the pure pursuit of perfect personality. Planting many orchids expresses the accumulation of many virtues, and also contains the poet's diligence in moral cultivation.

At the same time, orchid is not given religious color by the poet like rose in *Divine Comedy*, but is more closely connected with the secular politics of state Chu. In the second half of *Li Sao*, orchid is more used to compare the defector in the national political arena. "Orchid and Angelica lost their fragrance", "Valuable herbs like pepper and orchid have changed their quality and deteriorated."<sup>[16]</sup> Why did the virtuous person with talent become a villain? Qu Yuan explains: "is there any other reason? It's all caused by not loving their moral cultivation."<sup>[17]</sup> Qu Yuan is full of deep regret for the defector,<sup>[18]</sup> which also reflects his consistent belief in moral perfection in the field of secular emotions.

"The sky is dim, one day is going to pass, and I am weaving orchids, lingering for a long time."<sup>[19]</sup> Similar to Dante, in Qu Yuan's soul journey, he also goes to heaven, but Qu Yuan is shut the door upon his face and has to knot the orchid, lingering for a long time. God to Qu Yuan is also a projection of the emperor on secular world. What heaven can give him is also rejection and disappointment.<sup>[20]</sup> As a witness, orchid is experiencing the collapse of the poet's political ideal.

#### 4. The Poetic Feeling of Flowers Belongs to Religion

When the secular society can't explain the mysterious natural phenomena and cannot meet people's spiritual needs, religion often arises at the historic moment. The poems written by Dante and Qu Yuan during their exile also contain their respective religious feelings. Dante's religious emotion still belongs to the Middle Ages full of Catholic mysticism, and the rose in *Divine Comedy* is held up to paradise, "with the noble spirit of religious significance"<sup>[21]</sup>. Because of the origin of Chu mythology and the tradition of witchcraft and sacrifice, orchid in *Li Sao* has accumulated the religious implication beyond the secular society in Qu Yuan's works.

Dante writes in *Divine Comedy*: "the floral hoops around their heads is not made of lilies, but of

roses or other red flowers.”<sup>[22]</sup> Different from Qu Yuan's choice of orchid to his emphasize the humanized character of orchid, Dante's choice of rose here emphasizes the color of rose - red. In western culture, red is often used to express warm, cheerful, enthusiastic, excited and other positive mental state. It is often associated with joyous, auspicious days and celebrations. Dante's Paradise is intended to promote the peace and harmony of heaven and the joy and serenity enjoyed by the saints, and the spirit of humanism has been bred in his thought. Therefore, it is profoundly reasonable to replace white lily's plain abstinence with the red rose' ardent positivity.

“The eastern part of the sky is as red as rose” unfolds the magnificence of heaven under the control of God for readers. The bright red of the rose makes this magnificence more concrete and implies praise for God. “Thus, when Dante has to represent the supernatural glory of the Church triumphant in terms of splendor, love, and beauty, he resorts to the figure of the spotless rose.” “The people of heaven lines up in ranks and forms a rose to receive the glory of God.” [The Romans use roses to worship their favorite gods. The inhabitants of heaven forms a rose shaped queue to worship the god they revere, who represents the supreme glory.

Dante eulogizes God in Divine Comedy, and the use of rose is mostly associated with Catholic religious imageries. He praises the virtues of Catholicism, but also supports humanism. Qu Yuan is different from Dante's contradictory love of criticism and praise. His religious feelings put more emphasis on the cultural identity of Chu's primitive myth and witchcraft tradition.

The use of orchid in Qu Yuan's Li Sao shows his religious feeling. This feeling is closely related to the myth of Chu.

In the Chu mythology, the gods are portrayed as the image of wearing incense and fragrance, “hanging a string of autumn orchids as accessories”, the divine realm is also the land of many incenses surrounded by orchid, laurel, angelica and other herbs. Herbs such as orchid is sublimated into the precious representatives of heaven's gifts, which is the favourite of god, deiform, and can be used as the medium to the god. But Dante's rose and other flowers and trees do not have such functions. Wearing orchid and other herbs can bring man's self into interaction with the gods, so that they can be given life power by the gods, get rid of diseases and evil influence, get invisible healing, and enter the sacred realm of religion. People learn from gods, and like them, they string herbs and wear orchids. This not only is actuated by the aesthetic need of themselves, but also aims to get closer to the gods and please the gods, so as to achieve the purpose of praying for the protection of the gods, just as the residents of heaven form roses to praise the glory of God and receive the blessing of God.

Vanilla, such as orchid, has become a symbol in Chu. Its origin of praying for blessings and possessing supernatural powers in mythology and the tradition of exorcising evil spirits and offering sacrifices to gods in witchcraft enable it to obtain mystical religious affiliation and possess a kind of supernatural intimacy and dignity. Chu people's politics and religion are united. The king of Chu has double fuction, both a wizard and a king. Qu Yuan's former official position, Sanlv Dafu, is said to be related to sacrificial activities. In these regular sacrificial activities, it is this kind of influence that makes Qu Yuan have a strong attachment to religion, so he chose vanilla, chose orchid.

## 5. Conclusion

Dante and Qu Yuan, with the poet's perceptive spirit, ferry the unconscious plant world into the emotional realm of literature. This can give comfort and inspiration to ordinary people who are also facing the plight that is like exile. Even if the body is banished, the soul can return to the spiritual homeland of human civilization constructed by nature, secular society and religion. Despite the darkness of politics, the existence of rose and orchid is just like the giver of their poetic life, which is a kind of light itself.

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