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Literary Analysis: Boxers and Saints

The book *Boxers and Saints* presents a remarkable art of storytelling in which the author Gene Luen Yang presents two different stories in two volumes aimed to send a particular message. In essence, Yang in the book presents two different stories in two volumes with each story presenting different scenarios. However, despite their differences, the author remarkably weaves the two stories together such that while they are almost parallel to each other, both portray characters that are in search of a sense of belonging. This paper will as such look at how the author weaves the two stories together and the reason for this technique.

In the book, the author as suggested above tells two parallel stories focusing on two different characters. In the first volume, Yang tells the story of a Chinese peasant boy, Bao, whose village is raided and plundered by Westerners purporting to be missionaries. Inspired by Chinese gods, the young Bao joins a violent Chinese movement against the Western invaders (Yang and Pien 60-70). Despite the strength of the opponents, their uprising becomes successful. On the other side, in the second volume of the book, the author focuses on almost a different perspective on the conflict. In this volume, he tells the story of a young girl who feels indifferent towards her village and nation. Her village is invaded by Christian missionaries with whom she finds comfort. It is through the Christian missionaries that she finds her name, Vibiana that appears to offer her a sense of belonging (Yang and Pien 400). However, as the uprising gains

momentum, she becomes conflicted as to whether to side with her people or her new found faith and friends.

One of the most obvious ways Yang weaves these two narratives together is placing one as the antithesis of the other yet still related. In this regard, he uses one narrative as a contrast to the other in the bid to create two themes, that of rebellion and submission. This is evidenced by the aggressively directive ghost of Ch'in Shin-Huang and the rebellious young Bao on one side and the glowing image of martyr Joan of Arc favored by the humble Vibiana on the other side. The split between these two narratives, to a great extent, shows an intertwining of themes with the story of Bao presenting a theme of anger and that of Vibiana a theme of calmness. Bao, for one, is angry at the invasion of his village and nation and for this plans a revenge mission that sees him wage war at the Westerners (Yang and Pien 30-40). Bao together with his fellow boxers engages in increasingly violent methods in their quest to defeat the Westerners, a fact that shows evidence to the theme of anger. On the opposite side, Vibiana finds calmness from her confusion and the feeling of neglect. It is important to note that before she comes across the Christian missionaries she is troubled as she feels cursed and neglected. However, upon coming across the glowing image of Joan of Arc, she becomes impressed, converts to Christianity and finds calmness.

Despite this differences, young also weaves the narratives by involving almost the same occurrences and situations in both stories. One realizes that in both narratives, Westerners invade both Bao's and Vibiana's village. For instances, little Bao's country is attacked by foreign soldiers who bully and attack the poor in the countryside including his village. Religious missionaries also join in on the invasion and destruction destroying religious icons in an act the Bao believes is increasingly wrong. On the other side, Vibiana's village is also invaded by

foreigners, an act that is evidenced by the presence of Christian missionaries (Yang and Pien 360). Another occurrence that shows evidence as to how Yang intertwines the narratives is the similarity in experiences. For example, in the first story, Bao is propelled by a supernatural element in the ghost of Ch'in Shin-Huang while in the second story, Vibiana is also encouraged by the glowing image of Joan of Arc.

Yang also weaves the narratives by creating a certain perception of women in both stories. There seems to be an intention to reveal women as voiceless in the society in either narratives. For instance, in the first story, Mei-wen, a female fighter and the leader of the Kansu Braves, leaves Bao to name a group she leads rather than doing it herself. On her side, Vibiana seems highly voiceless regarding which side to align with. It is like she is afraid of making her own decision.

The main reason Yang weaves the two narratives together is to assist him to develop themes in a manner that looks at the whole society regardless of the existing situations as earlier noted. Another perfect example of this apart from the themes of anger and calmness highlighted earlier is the effort to develop the theme of searching for identity and belongingness. In this regard, Yang attempts to posit that regardless of the conditions or occurrence in a society, people can have the same struggle. This is witnessed in how despite the uniqueness of the two situations and the approaches taken by both protagonists, they both appear to be in search of their identity and some form of belongingness. For instance, in his rebellion, Bao struggles to seek his identity and that of his people by taking it back from the Westerners. On her part, Vibiana struggles to understand where she fits only to find comfort and identity in Christianity. Another reason why Yang weaves the two narratives as he does is to make captivate his audience. In essence, it is the intertwining and parallels in the story that captures the audience. Just when the reader thinks the

story is over, Yang offers another version that is equally interesting and allows the reader to further understand the book.

From the analysis above, it is evident that Yang remarkably weaves two stories in his book using different techniques such as contrasting and developing similar experiences. For instance, he weaves Bao's and Vibiana's stories by creating one as the opposite of the other. In another case, he makes the stories similar by enabling same occurrences and experiences. Through this, he succeeds in developing accurate themes while also making his book increasingly captivating. This leads to the suggestion that it is through this technique that the book manages to be popular and successful.

Work Cited

Yang, Gene L, and Lark Pien. *Boxers & Saints: Boxed Set.* , 2013. Print.