

The Cross-Media Translation Pathways and Aesthetic Strategies of Literariness in *The Eternal Wave*

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Abstract: This paper takes the cross-media adaptation of *The Eternal Wave* from literature to the stage as a case study, exploring the translational pathways of literariness within dance drama and opera. Treating literariness as the core aesthetic value, it systematically examines its mechanisms of manifestation in narrative construction, character shaping, lyrical expression, and ideological articulation. Through comparative analysis, it is found that dance drama relies on bodily movement, spatial utilization, and stage choreography to create embodied visual metaphors and narrative structures, whereas opera, through musical development, vocal performance, and its overall structural framework, constructs linear auditory symbolism and emotional flow. The investigation of the transformation of this work between these two artistic forms is not merely a comparison of their artistic characteristics; rather, it seeks to address key issues in cross-media adaptation: how to preserve the intrinsic artistic properties of each medium while achieving effective narrative reception and dissemination, thereby eliciting emotional resonance from the audience. Consequently, this study focuses on how literariness is reorganized within different stage media, rather than extending to broader issues of dissemination or cultural identity.

Keywords: cross-media literariness; translational pathways; aesthetic strategies; red classics; *The Eternal Wave*

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1. Introduction

The *Eternal Wave* belongs to the category of “red classics.” Its cross-media adaptation from text to dance drama and opera provides a paradigmatic case for exploring the mechanisms of artistic translation. This study takes the transformation and elevation of literariness in this process as its central focus; therefore, it is first necessary to define the

concept. In this paper, literariness does not merely refer to the artistic features of language, but rather to a core aesthetic value that can be transmitted, transformed, and sustained within a cross-media context. Its concrete manifestations are reflected mainly in narrative organization, psychological expression, and symbolic or thematic patterning. The original text, through its espionage narrative, portrays the spirit of self-sacrifice and emotional

contradictions of ordinary individuals while promoting the red ideological theme, thereby establishing a solid literary foundation across these dimensions. Based on this foundation, the present study analyzes how dance drama achieves embodied narration through the body, posture, and rhythm, and how opera accomplishes integrated expression through music, visual elements, and dramatic structure. It further deconstructs and reconstructs literariness, revealing the pathways and aesthetic strategies involved in the process of cross-media translation. The following analysis proceeds by examining how these dimensions are reconfigured in dance drama and opera.

From this theoretical perspective, examining the literariness of *The Eternal Wave* in both dance drama and opera carries significant theoretical value and practical implications. The reason this work serves as a classic case lies primarily in the inherent qualities of its literary original. The source text does not merely remain at the level of verbal representation; rather, through strong narrative tension and dramatic conflict, it constructs an artistic core rich in imagery and highly amenable to translation. This characteristic provides dance drama and opera—two markedly different art forms—with a shared origin while enabling distinct creative environments. The juxtaposition method employed in this study does not aim at isolated or simplistic evaluation; instead, it adopts a comprehensive and systematic perspective to conduct both horizontal analysis and vertical comparison. Within this framework, dance drama, through embodied narration, and opera, through integrated expression, each establish mechanisms of literariness transformation aligned with their respective media characteristics. By comparing the similarities and differences in their translational pathways, this study moves beyond the limitations of analyzing adaptation forms alone and explores the interaction between the stable core of literariness and its high translatability as it traverses media dominated by different sensory modalities.

At present, some audiences exhibit a relatively limited level of acceptance toward *The Eternal Wave*

in its operatic and dance drama forms. An analysis of this phenomenon from the internal logic of cross-media adaptation suggests that it largely stems from structural discrepancies between the characteristics of artistic media and the audience's habitual modes of reception. When dance drama and opera transform literariness into deep-level artistic sign systems, an excessive emphasis on formal exploration by creators may alienate audiences accustomed to traditional narrative modes. In dance drama, where the body functions as a system of signification, overly abstract or insufficiently clear bodily language can easily hinder audience perception and emotional resonance. Opera, for its part, must carefully balance musical lyricism and dramatic progression, avoiding both the weakening of narrative momentum due to musical expansion and the impairment of musical expressivity due to insufficient dramatic structure. During the adaptation process, deviations in the interpretation of the original spirit may lead either to mechanical replication of the plot lacking contemporary interpretation or to excessive subversion that detaches the work from the audience's emotional memory, thereby producing an imbalance between the work and its reception. In terms of stage presentation, the absence of adequate audiovisual guidance—such as ineffective lighting design in dance drama failing to reinforce narrative coherence, or unclear subtitles in opera—can further intensify cognitive difficulties. The diversity of audience responses fundamentally reveals a deep-seated tension between the essential transformation of artistic forms and the outcomes of their dissemination and reception. Therefore, adaptation must establish more strategic channels of dialogue, integrating aesthetic considerations with audience communication. However, in order to maintain analytical clarity, the present discussion focuses primarily on the level of formal transformation across media.

The issues observed at the level of audience reception directly reflect the practical concerns of this study. The aim is not merely to compare the artistic characteristics of dance drama and opera,

but to confront the fundamental challenges of cross-media adaptation—namely, how to achieve a dialectical unity between the intrinsic laws of artistic forms and the effects of mass dissemination and emotional resonance. Existing discussions tend to focus primarily on how such transformations are implemented, while paying comparatively insufficient attention to why they are embraced or resisted. When the information conveyed through bodily language in dance drama becomes overly abstract and difficult to comprehend, or when the musical components in opera compromise the clarity of the narrative, the textual connotations may deviate from the audience's expected psychological horizon.

Taking *The Eternal Wave* as a representative case, this study undertakes a theoretical inquiry that is both diagnostic and constructive, offering a detailed comparison of the two adaptation forms of dance drama and opera. First, it analyzes the limitations in their formal creation and levels of reception, elevating discrepancies in audience feedback into an academic interpretation of the deeper logic linking media characteristics, translational strategies, and reception outcomes. Second, it seeks to move beyond the scope of a single case to summarize translational principles with broader applicability, thereby providing a conceptual framework for the stage adaptation of red classics and other literary works—specifically, how to achieve an organic unity between artistic autonomy and widespread dissemination. In this way, the research value of this paper extends beyond a mere comparison of artistic forms to encompass the contemporary transformation of canonical texts and the construction of cultural identity, both of which hold substantial practical significance.

2. The Translation of Narrative Function: From the Poetics of Body and Space to the Drama of Music and Time

In their representation of narrative, dance drama and opera typically employ media-specific modes of expression, transforming the sequential literary

elements of exposition, foreshadowing, and suspense into stage forms characterized by strong sensory tension. Dance drama narration follows the principle that the body serves as the expressive instrument while space constitutes the structural logic, relying on the visual associations generated by the intensity, rhythm, and staging of movement to convey meaning. A static pose, a shifting gaze, or the aggregation and dispersion of a crowd—these poetic images co-constructed by body and space inherently contain conflict and premonition.

Opera, by contrast, treats the human voice and instruments as its primary media and musical form as its structural framework. It achieves narrative objectives through the insertion and variation of thematic motifs, dramatic transformations of harmonic color, and the auditory rendering of inner states through arias and ensembles. The recurrence of melody evokes associations with trajectories of fate; a timbral shift from firmness to tremor externalizes emotional fluctuation; dissonant intervals in choral writing generate a collective atmosphere of suspense. Dance drama narration thus constitutes a spatialized, embodied practice of meaning production, reconfiguring temporal plots into visually striking instantaneous images. Opera narration, on the other hand, unfolds as a temporally linear, structured sonic process, translating event sequences into an audible logic of emotional progression. Although their pathways differ, both enable audiences to bypass verbal language and apprehend plot development and existential implications through direct visual or auditory perception.

2.1 From Literary Psychological Description to Embodied Narration in Dance Drama

Approximately four minutes into the opening of the dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, a brief subtitle first establishes the covert background of Li Xia and Lan Fen as a “fake couple” operating undercover. This is followed by a pas de deux that presents their everyday tenderness through bodily interaction. Subsequently, the choreographer introduces a rapid and decisive synchronized turning movement. This

design is not merely a matter of stage blocking; rather, it dynamically disrupts the previously constructed atmosphere of softness. At the moment of stillness following the turn, Lan Fen's gaze undergoes a sudden transformation—from the earlier gentleness and apparent dependence to a distinctly alert, perceptive, and composed scrutiny. This nonverbal sign, formed through the integration of bodily movement and facial expression, generates a highly condensed poetic narrative image, fully demonstrating the dance drama's capacity to artistically translate and reconstruct literary connotations.

From a narrative perspective, the design of this turning glance relies on visual and corporeal means to fulfill the dual literary functions of exposition and foreshadowing. First, it immediately reveals the dramatic effect of a relationship that appears tender on the surface yet conceals underlying complexity, while also conveying the true nature of the characters' bond: their intimacy is in fact a performative disguise necessitated by revolutionary duty. Second, the sudden shift in Lan Fen's gaze functions analogously to psychological description in literary narration, rendering the vigilance and professional competence required of an underground operative as an immediately perceptible visual sign. This gaze signifies, on the one hand, acute sensitivity to external risks, and on the other, a momentary withdrawal from the "performed" situation shared with her partner, thereby laying a crucial foundation for the subsequent development of a tense and complex plot.

In terms of character construction as an expression of literariness, this segment significantly enhances the psychological layering and dimensionality of the role. With a single shift of the eyes, Lan Fen transforms from a performed wife into an authentic revolutionary agent, powerfully manifesting the dual tension between personal emotion and revolutionary mission on stage. (Nie Wei, 2024) This treatment transcends the limitations of textual psychological description; through meticulous control of facial musculature, precise calibration of

gaze direction, and instantaneous modulation of expression, the abstract concept of vigilance is rendered visually perceptible and aesthetically embodied. In this way, the dance drama replaces the complex modes of representing human nature found in literariness with a poetics of the body, such that characters' thoughts are no longer conveyed solely through language but are already embedded within their movements and gazes.

In terms of thematic symbolism and atmospheric construction, this backward glance constitutes a condensed expression of the core metaphor of the entire work. The vigilance it conveys is not merely a behavioral response to a specific situation, but also a symbolic representation of the unchanging spiritual state of revolutionaries during their covert operations. (Deng Jiao, 2022) Beneath the apparent tenderness lies an ever-present and unrelenting acuity of perception; behind seemingly tranquil daily life, latent tensions and concealed struggles continue to surge. This gaze interacts with the ensuing tense sound effects and cold lighting, thereby shifting the stage space from the surface-level world of everyday life to a deeper reality fraught with danger. In this way, the dramatic atmosphere undergoes a poetic transformation from warmth to chill, employing bodily movement to articulate a "standing-on-the-edge-of-an-abyss" existential experience that resists full encapsulation by language.

In sum, although the design of this turning glance appears simple, it is by no means an ordinary transitional movement. Rather, it exemplifies how the dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, through the unique properties of its artistic medium, profoundly transforms literary content into artistic form. Through highly condensed and aesthetically refined bodily symbols, the ritualistic implications embedded in synchronized turning, and the precise control of shifting gazes, this segment integrates narrative progression, nuanced psychological depiction, the subtle construction of dual identities, and thematic symbolism into an organically unified visual whole. It embodies the expressive power of "silence surpassing sound." This example

demonstrates that, within the perspective of cross-media creation, literariness can not only be conveyed through the language of dance but can also be elevated—through bodily dynamics and the interaction of gazes—into a more concentrated, immediate, and affectively powerful poetic art form.

2.2 From Text to Soundscape: The Functional Divergence of Repetition Strategies in Opera and Literature

In the opera *The Eternal Wave*, the phrase “the nightingale has arrived” is structurally repeated within choral passages, exemplifying the reproducibility inherent in musicality. This constitutes a typical operatic strategy for reorganizing a literary device within a musical-dramatic structure. Such treatment shifts repetition from a semantic function in text to a structural function in musical progression; instead, through musical development, the dramatic rendering of collective vocal parts, and the gradual accumulation of symbolic meaning, it transforms the original text’s dual implications of anticipation and alarm into an experience that directly engages the audience’s senses and emotions.

Opera is an art form that unfolds within the dimension of time, fundamentally distinct from the spatial organization characteristic of written language. In literary reading, repeated recitation of the same phrase can easily induce fatigue and dull semantic perception. However, within the temporally unfolding auditory process of opera, repetition becomes a primary driving force for the development of musical structure and dramatic conflict. Through subtle adjustments in harmonic effect, orchestration, vocal layering, and performance intensity with each recurrence, the composer achieves gradual variation within a cyclical process. As a result, each reappearance of “the nightingale has arrived” signifies a progressive intensification—whether of mounting tension, the imminent approach of danger, or the consolidation of confidence. Such treatment not only compensates for the limitations of static repetition in written

language but also expands its expressive range within the dynamic process of music.

The use of choral form in this passage adds two further layers of depth to the strategy of repetition: collective psychology and dramatic irony. From the perspective of plot, the progressive youths on stage sing in unison, expressing their ardent anticipation for the “nightingale” as both a revolutionary messenger and an embodiment of hope. From a metaphorical perspective, however, this creates an audiovisual effect akin to fate knocking at the door and the sweeping advance of historical tides, thereby intensifying dramatic suspense and enriching emotional density. The performers’ facial expressions and vocal modulations reinforce one another, guiding the audience’s emotional fluctuations. What the audience receives is not merely the surface meaning of words, but rather a form of collective emotional resonance embedded within the undulating waves of sound. (Xiao Luo, 2013)

This musicalized repetition further expands the literary connotations of the central image of the “nightingale.” The overture establishes a somber tone with the declaration “the nightingale is dead,” followed by the repeated reappearance of “the nightingale has arrived.” Within the developmental trajectory of operatic music, this generates a powerful dramatic contrast while also maintaining a deep semantic continuity. In this way, the “nightingale” evolves from a static textual metaphor into a “sonic protagonist” moving through the dramatic action, bearing the weight of both narrative turning points and spiritual anchorage. The repeatedly intoned lyrics function like tolling bells, inscribing this symbol deeply into the audience’s auditory perception and emotional memory.

The strategy of repetition in opera is not a mere transplantation of literary technique; rather, it is an artistic form determined by the intrinsic integration of music and drama. Through the temporal extension, variation, and cumulative layering of sound, it transforms aspects often understated in literary texts—such as atmospheric construction

and emotional accumulation—into a process of dramatic progression that can be directly perceived through hearing, endowed with both formal aesthetic qualities and emotional evocative power. In this way, a textual motif is transformed into an auditory structure that organizes both narrative expectation and emotional intensity.

2.3 From Monologue to Counterpoint: The Dramatic Expansion of Literary Psychological Representation in Opera

In the opera *The Eternal Wave*, scenes depicting interrogation and suspicion employ the interweaving of vocal counterpoint to construct a field of dramatic irony. At this moment, the work translates the latent psychological activities and complex interpersonal relations found in literature into an audibly perceptible field of psychological tension. This differs from literary techniques that rely on shifts in narrative perspective to reveal inner states, and instead establishes a mode of simultaneous psychological representation in opera. Once rendered through singing, inner psychological activity acquires a legitimate and public form of expression. For instance, Liu Nina's line— "So the nightingale is not Li Xia"— does not merely recount a plot point; rather, it condenses her shock, disappointment, and sense of betrayal into a vocalized expression. Similarly, the Japanese officer's line— "Liu Nina has seemed uneasy of late; could she be playing a double game?" transforms his suspicion, calculation, and surveillance under authority into an audible form. Content that in literary works typically requires interior monologue or a specific narrative perspective is thus reconstituted in opera as highly expressive vocal segments, allowing the audience to enter directly into the characters' cognitive space while bypassing intermediary processes of interpretation and transition.

Through the integration of music and stage performance, interior monologue acquires distinct individuality and heightened emotional tension. Liu Nina's aria employs a sharply descending melodic line to produce dissonant sonorities, thereby

rendering the psychological shock of cognitive disintegration. The performer's manipulation of articulation strength, the suppression of vowels, and the rapid transition of facial expression—from composure to astonishment and suspicion—visually and aurally externalize the collapse of her inner world. In contrast, the Japanese officer's aria utilizes a circuitous low-register melody, controlled pianissimo, and sudden dynamic outbursts to convey an outward calm concealing latent murderous intent. Performance details such as a vacant gaze and trembling fingers further enrich the layered portrayal of suspicion constructed through sound.

The composer arranges Liu Nina's self-doubting aria and the Japanese officer's suspicious aria in a sequentially superimposed manner within the same dramatic time-space, thereby creating, from a musical perspective, a structure akin to montage—one characterized by contrast and irony. This generates a dual process of revelation: on the one hand, it discloses Liu Nina's realization of the true identity of the "nightingale"; on the other, it reveals her own entrapment within a perilous system of scrutiny. Such treatment carries a strong sense of dramatic irony and foreshadows the trajectory of fate, enabling the audience to attain a higher level of awareness than the characters themselves. Consequently, within an atmosphere that is both tense and enigmatic, the audience is able to perceive more profoundly the intricate and cold nature of power relations.

Large sections of the opera *The Eternal Wave* do not rely solely on vocal delivery to convey character psychology; rather, they construct precise musical images through the uniquely operatic mode of "auralizing" inner consciousness. By employing a polyphonic narrative structure, the opera compresses the gradually unfolding inner conflicts and relational tensions of the literary script into concentrated musical-dramatic segments that combine intellectual depth with emotional intensity. This approach not only propels the narrative forward but also projects, within the audience's cognition, a clearer psychological map of power

relations than that available to the characters themselves, thereby showing how opera reorganizes psychological tension and power relations into a simultaneous auditory structure.

3. The Deep Translation of Character and Psychology: The Internalization of “Bodily Poetics” and the Externalization of “Vocal Drama”

Dance drama and opera each establish parallel and functionally equivalent aesthetic systems—namely, “bodily poetics” and “vocal drama.” In dance drama, deep psychological activity is translated into bodily language, character imagery, and emotional expression, embedded within the dynamic coordination of bodily centers and the rhythmic flow of movement. Psychological portrayal is realized through what may be termed “micro-performative expression”: the trembling of fingertips, the shifting of gaze—these refined yet emotionally authentic corporeal details contain a form of psychological vocabulary that directly engages the audience’s intuitive perception, allowing inner states to be manifested through the body.

Opera, by contrast, grants the spiritual world of characters a direct auditory presence. Through melodic characteristics and core motifs, it establishes the tonal foundation of roles while capturing fleeting psychological dynamics with precision. In operatic art, the logic of musical development is simultaneously the logic of emotional progression. While dance drama delineates the inner world through posture and kinetic rhythm in silence, both forms, through their respective creative pathways, probe the complex and nuanced authenticity of human emotion.

3.1 Psychological Monologue in Enclosed Space: The Translational Path from Literary Description to Dance Movement

At approximately the seventh minute of the dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, a solo performance set within a newspaper elevator is presented. With acute awareness of the medium, the choreographer

constructs this stage scene as a transformation of two core issues that run throughout the literary narrative—identity transition and psychological struggle—into the language of dance.

The elevator, as an enclosed transitional space, carries profound metaphorical significance. It is not only a site of physical movement but also a ritualized node where the protagonist Li Xia regulates his psyche and completes identity transformation. Within the confined space after the elevator doors close, the dancer performs through a highly condensed movement vocabulary charged with deep internal conflict. Upon entering, he initially appears in the relaxed state of an ordinary citizen, but almost immediately shifts into a vigilant posture of attentive listening. Tensed muscles and a piercing gaze directed toward an invisible intelligence network highlight the contrast deliberately constructed in the choreography between restraint and exposure, surface appearance and inner essence.

Externally, in response to the social environment, he must maintain composure and propriety; internally, however, rapid fluctuations of breath, subtle flexion and extension of the fingers, and the sudden straightening of the spine reveal his intense focus on intelligence gathering and underlying anxiety. The opening and closing of the elevator doors function as a pivotal dramatic axis: when the doors close, it marks a concealed interval in which the public mask is shed and the true mission is revealed; when the doors open, all inner tension is instantly concealed, and the performer’s expression and body return to an almost indifferent natural state, as he steps calmly into the newspaper office, completing a silent transition from intelligence operative to social employee.

This segment, through the dialectical logic of dance-specific bodily movement, transforms the conflict between professional disguise and inner authenticity—often elaborately depicted in literary texts—into a series of observable bodily dynamics and facial expressions within a defined spatiotemporal frame. (Zhang Fan & Liu Kaili, 2023) The elevator solo thus becomes a highly condensed

theatrical ritual that not only advances the narrative but also profoundly reveals the fundamental contradiction of the undercover agent's existence: his most authentic self can only be entrusted to those fleeting, mechanical intervals of social role transition.

3.2 Poetic Exaggeration: On the Translation and Expansion of Literary Psychological Description through Dance Language

At approximately the twenty-first minute of the dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, a symbolically charged narrative structure is constructed through vertical spatial division and stage choreography. The upper level represents the telegraph operation area, while the lower level depicts domestic life. A clear physical boundary separates the two, visually articulating the coexistence of social responsibility, private life, revolutionary duty, and familial affection borne by the protagonist. This spatial arrangement constitutes a visual refinement and symbolic intensification of the environmental description found in literary texts.

Within this vertically stratified stage structure, Lan Fen's "quiet descent" becomes a paradigmatic instance of translating literary psychological description into dance. The dancer conveys a cautious psychological state—often articulated through textual narration—by significantly slowing her steps, nearly suspending control at the tips of her feet, leaning forward in a listening posture, and maintaining a concentrated, breath-held expression. This form of artistic amplification does not depart from reality; rather, it arises from the medium-specific characteristics of dance drama. Abandoning the naturalistic tendencies of spoken drama, it employs poetic corporeal rhetoric—such as delay, emphasis, and freeze—to intensify the expressive force of inner emotion and intentional action, thereby achieving maximal narrative clarity and emotional impact without reliance on spoken language.

When the two characters receive joyful news transmitted through Morse code, their leaps and bodily extensions adhere to the distinctive

expressive logic of dance drama. In contrast to the restrained and implicit mode of spoken theatre, dance drama amplifies bodily range and intensifies facial expression, transforming exaggerated literary emotions—such as overwhelming excitement—into visible bodily energy perceptible to the audience. This approach fundamentally aligns with the aesthetic purpose of exaggeration in literary rhetoric: to intensify form in order to access the core of emotion. The audience's acceptance of such artistic exaggeration lies in its precise grasp of the deeper truth consistent with the characters' emotional logic within specific dramatic circumstances. In moments of silence, dance language achieves an equivalent—and even enhanced—expression of the emotional depth and dramatic tension found in literature, demonstrating the powerful capacity of dance drama to reconstruct literary psychological representation through its own bodily poetics.

3.3 Beyond the Literary "Character Sketch": Operatic Psychological Imaging

In the opera *The Eternal Wave*, Liu Nina's aria "Life Is but a Play" elevates what is typically a background exposition in literary works into a profound dramatic soliloquy of the soul through opera's distinctive mode of lyrical depth, transforming it into an auditory presentation of existential philosophy. The familiar literary trope "life as theatre" is employed by the character to summarize her understanding of her own existence, encompassing two layers of meaning: first, a reflection on her identity as a spy who must constantly perform under shifting masks; second, an implicit acknowledgment of the individual's powerlessness to determine their own fate when swept along by the tides of history. By positioning such a proposition at a climactic juncture and a key emotional threshold, opera shifts the attention from narrative progression to the character's awareness of her own condition.

This aria reworks the literary function of character introduction into a moment of sustained self-articulation. Rather than statically recounting

background information, it invites the audience to experience and comprehend the character's self-awareness and self-expression at a specific moment, relying on music's capacity to generate and immediately manifest emotion on stage. The aria thus becomes an effective gateway into the character's inner world: it conveys identity while also revealing the psychological motivations behind actions and the existential dilemmas faced. In this sense, inner consciousness itself becomes the primary dramatic event. In doing so, it transforms the character from a functional narrative device into a dramatic subject endowed with a complex interiority. From this perspective, literariness in opera is not confined to storytelling but is reorganized through the temporal extension of music and vocal performance.

4. The Ultimate Translation of Image and Theme: The Construction of Visual Metaphor and Auditory Symbolism

In their pursuit of constructing core imagery and elevating thematic expression, dance drama and opera do not merely provide straightforward illustrations of literary content. Instead, they establish profound metaphorical systems through their respective stage languages. Dance drama tends to employ props and collective bodily movement as poetic signifiers; through transformations of form, trajectories of motion, and the interweaving of group choreography, it constructs a network of visual metaphors that render intangible pressures and the flow of history perceptible, linking individual destiny with collective imagery and thereby generating resonance.

Opera, by contrast, relies on the abstract nature and structural advantages of music to construct an intricate system of auditory symbolism. Through the deployment and development of leitmotifs across the entire work, combined with vocal performance, it enriches thematic expression with layered emotional depth and substantial spiritual resonance. Choral writing, in particular, often serves as the sonic manifestation of historical intention or

the driving force of fate. While dance drama condenses themes through spatialized and embodied visual metaphors, opera deepens them through temporally structured auditory symbolism. Each, through its own artistic pathway, achieves the transformation of literary imagery into stage representation.

4.1 The Elevation of Props: Constructing a Visual Metaphor System from "Black Umbrellas" to a "Labyrinth"

In the dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, the "black umbrella" ensemble sequence vividly demonstrates how dance transforms literary narration and metaphor into a distinctive artistic effect. When numerous umbrellas move in unison, they resemble an endless expanse of mist; their rhythmic rising and falling, all tilted in a single direction, evoke the oppressive atmosphere of storm clouds pressing down upon a city, while also suggesting the pervasive danger and hidden threats within enemy-occupied territory. In this way, danger becomes visually perceptible at a glance.

Within this fluid labyrinthine formation, the choreographic pathways of Li Xia and Lan Fen generate considerable dramatic tension. At times, they intersect at the edges of the umbrella formations; at others, they are separated by shifting black barriers. Their bodies maintain visible proximity while preserving necessary distance. This choreography aptly expresses the inherent contradiction of underground work: physical closeness coexists with enforced emotional and identity-based separation. Although their movements may be synchronized, they do not gaze at one another; after brief contact, they immediately part. (Zhang Fan & Liu Kaili, 2023) This coexistence of synchrony and dislocation translates the literary image of "intimacy yet distance" into a corporeal form charged with emotional tension. The performers' control of facial expression is crucial: while their faces remain outwardly composed, their eyes subtly search and then swiftly withdraw, revealing both deep longing and heightened vigilance.

Here, the “black umbrella” transcends its utilitarian function as a prop and is elevated into a central poetic image of the work. On one level, it evokes the rainy urban environment of Shanghai’s alleyways; on another, it metaphorically represents the hidden dangers within a complex intelligence network and the deeper psychological estrangement it entails. The opening and closing of umbrellas suggest fleeting opportunities, while the shifting formation of the umbrella array visualizes structures of power. The protagonists’ repeated passage through this space resembles an exploration of pathways and vulnerabilities within a rigorous symbolic system—an inherently perilous journey. Through stage imagery alone, the work articulates the literary theme of undertaking missions under constant threat.

4.2 The Superimposition of Time and Space: The Structural Transformation of Flashback and Evidentiary Narration through Stage Juxtaposition

At approximately the sixteenth minute of the dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, the “photo development” sequence introduces an innovative stage language that transforms the literary narrative device of uncovering and tracing crucial evidence into a creative form of cross-media artistic expression, thereby demonstrating the unique literary expressivity of dance as a composite art form.

The staging choice of having the performer face away from the audience constitutes the first level of artistic transformation. The character—journalist A Wei—remains turned away throughout the scene, yet this does not hinder audience comprehension. The tension in his back muscles, the rapid and precise movements within the darkroom, and his forward-leaning posture conveying concentration transform otherwise inexpressible inner states into vivid bodily imagery. This “back-view” mode of presentation shifts the audience’s focus from facial expression to the interpretive reading of bodily movement, thereby achieving a formal transformation from psychological narration to corporeal inscription.

Through spatial division and juxtaposition, the stage generates a profound innovation in narrative form. The choreographer divides the performance space into a darkroom working area and a zone for the reenactment of photographic images. Whenever A Wei develops a photograph in the darkroom, the lighting in the adjacent performance area is activated, and the figures captured in the image (such as Li Xia and Lan Fen), rendered in highly faithful frozen expressions and poses, are dynamically “awakened.” This treatment creates an effect of temporal superimposition: the moment of past capture and the present act of development are made visible simultaneously. The content of memory as evidence and the process of tracing its material carrier are thus visually juxtaposed. The figures within the photograph remain fixed in form, while their counterparts within the main narrative unfold dynamically, establishing a dialogic relationship. Their suspended expressions and stylized poses resemble the literary technique of focusing on critical details and invoking retrospective flashbacks, thereby intensifying both the dramatic tension of evidence and the historical weight it conveys.

This segment (Feng Dalei & Wang Dan, 2023) transcends mere plot narration, ascending to a meta-narrative level concerned with the manifestation of memory and the reconstruction of history. Through its distinctive use of spatial and bodily expression, dance transforms the concrete act of photo development into a dynamic, visualized process of interpreting and revealing evidence. This form, characterized by immediacy, simultaneity, and emotional impact, offers a unique stage-based pathway for translating literary devices such as suspense construction and memory structuring into performative art.

4.3 On “O Heroic You”: From Overture Prophecy to Final Legacy as a Musical Closure

At the conclusion of the opera *The Eternal Wave*, the progressive youths once again sing “O Heroic You,” a theme first introduced in the overture. This artistic strategy moves beyond the conventional literary

device of structural symmetry between beginning and ending. Drawing upon opera's nature as a temporal art, it forms a cyclical musical-dramatic structure in which meaning is progressively elevated. In the overture, "O Heroic You" functions as a generalized eulogy to an unseen hero; when it reappears in the finale, the same melody and lyrics have been reinterpreted through the concrete fates and sacrifices of characters such as Li Xia and Lan Fen, transforming into a tribute and affirmation of real individual lives. This elevation of meaning, achieved through the diachronic unfolding of dramatic time, demonstrates music's unique capacity to accumulate emotion and memory.

This musical closure establishes a solemn aesthetic framework for the entire opera, imbuing the narrative with a pronounced epic quality. It suggests that individual sacrifice does not signify an end, but rather becomes integrated into an ongoing process of spiritual inheritance. As audiences leave the theatre, the heroic theme—personally heard and emotionally internalized—continues to resonate in their minds, producing a profound level of aesthetic and emotional response. This resonance is not merely a reaction to formal structure; rather, through music's mnemonic power and its capacity for thematic variation, opera transforms the heroic motif into a shared spiritual legacy. In doing so, it reveals the core literary attribute through which opera narrates through sound and constructs a lasting field of emotional resonance.

5. Comparative Differences in the Transformation of Literariness in Dance Drama and Opera

Dance drama and opera show different tendencies in their transformation of literariness, largely shaped by the characteristics of their respective media. Dance drama belongs to the realm of spatial art, with its core lying in the exploration of possibilities in space, body, and visuality. It transforms narrative into an art of spatial construction, integrating the inner world into the texture and rhythm of movement through bodily expression and their interaction. Its narrative emerges from the logic inherent in movement itself

and from the visual structures formed through group choreography, relying on condensed imagery to synthesize complex situations within a brief temporal span.

Opera, by contrast, emphasizes temporal extension, auditory expression, and formal structuring. It is an art in which sound unfolds and takes shape along a temporal axis. Through the progression of melody and vocal performance, opera constructs a distinctive auditory form, and its musical-dramatic structure inherently contains the force that propels narrative development, excelling in transforming emotion into perceptible acoustic experience. While dance drama achieves concentrated bursts of meaning through bodily symbolism within a synchronous spatial field, opera realizes the deep sedimentation of emotion through the continuity of sound across a diachronic process. Through different artistic pathways, both rework literary material into stage-specific forms of meaning.

5.1 The Spatial Reorganization of Emotional Development in Dance Drama

A key scene in the dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, occurring around the one-hour-and-twenty-five-minute mark, uses stage spatial construction and bodily narration to present character relationships that are developed in linear sequence in the literary text through a simultaneous visual arrangement. This treatment transforms the internal emotional trajectory into a shared and perceptible aesthetic experience for the audience.

The stage is constructed as a composite field encompassing multiple temporal dimensions and psychological mechanisms. Li Xia and Lan Fen, as a married couple, occupy the central focus of audience attention, while three additional pairs of performers represent mirrored stages of their relationship—initial encounter, growing intimacy, and shared hardship—coexisting within the same physical space. Rather than functioning as simple cinematic flashbacks, this arrangement grants equal ontological presence to past emotional states, present experience, and fragments of memory. From a choreographic perspective, the movement

vocabulary of each stage displays clear diachronic characteristics: initial encounters are marked by restraint and distance; familiarity brings coordination and fluidity; and shared adversity produces mutual support. These thematic movements evolve continuously across stages, resembling a visualized leitmotif that articulates the deep logic of emotional progression.

The innovation of this stage design lies in the shared gesture of “cross-temporal gazing” among the four couples: the present selves look upon their past counterparts with eyes filled with remembrance. At times, these mirrored figures exchange gazes or perform synchronized actions, generating a form of empathy and dialogue that transcends linear temporality. This mode of staging transforms the traditional one-directional output of memory into a ritualized space of self-recognition and emotional healing. When performers accurately capture the emotional characteristics of each stage, the act of gazing—toward both past and future selves—conveys the layered emotional accumulation shaped by time.

This sequence surpasses conventional literary narrative modes by condensing a diachronic process of emotional development into a spatialized structure that can be observed from multiple perspectives and interpreted repeatedly. The depth and weight of conjugal affection are not gradually accumulated through textual narration but are instead immediately and comprehensively revealed through the simultaneous presence and mutual illumination of multiple perspectives. This example mainly highlights the spatial strength of dance drama and serves as a point of comparison with opera’s more temporally sustained mode of development.

5.2 Reverse Temporal Presentation and Narrative Reconstruction in Dance Drama

Combat scenes are no longer presented through realistic depictions of physical struggle; instead, they are rendered through stylized bodily confrontation and controlled stage rhythm. In the concluding section of the dance drama *The Eternal*

Wave, the choreographer employs reverse temporal narration and parallel spatial arrangement to rework literary devices such as retrospective revelation and multi-threaded progression. This highlights the unique narrative charm of dance drama as an art form integrating time and space.

The realization of temporal reversal relies on the creation of an intensifying ticking sound, which generates internal emotional rhythm and guides performers to move according to a reversed temporal logic. Beginning from a state of stillness or conclusion, performers reconstruct preceding events through a series of precisely controlled rotations, backward shifts of bodily center, and inverted sequences of falling movements—kinetic processes that seemingly defy physical causality. In this way, the intense confrontation between Lao Fang and Liu Nina is gradually rewound: from outcome to preceding tension, then to earlier confrontation, unfolding frame by frame in reverse. Facial expressions also undergo reversal, shifting from heightened dramatic intensity back to an initial state of composed disguise. This embodied reverse temporality breaks through the linear structure of literary flashback, endowing retrospective narration with ritualistic quality and visual impact, transforming the search for truth into an aesthetic experience imbued with suspense and a sense of fate.

In another area of the stage, the interaction between Lan Fen and A Wei unfolds in normal chronological order, creating two simultaneous temporalities—one moving backward into the past, the other progressing forward in the present. Through lighting segmentation and precise staging, these two temporalities coexist within a unified visual frame. The audience must continuously shift their attention between them, actively reconstructing causal relationships and dramatic tension. This juxtaposition of dual narrative lines resembles the synchronic reading of parallel chapters, while dance drama’s spatial immediacy allows for direct comparison of emotional tone and rhythm, enhancing narrative layering, density, and expressive power.

This segment exemplifies a sophisticated deconstruction and reconstruction of literary narrative mechanisms on stage. Through reverse bodily movement, linear time is dismantled; through spatial division and juxtaposition, the narrative network is reassembled. In the audience's consciousness, fragmented information is integrated into a coherent whole. Here, the emphasis remains on how dance drama reorganizes narrative sequence through space, rhythm, and bodily reversal rather than on any broader theoretical claim.

6. Conclusion

Taking *The Eternal Wave* as a representative case, this study places dance drama and opera on the same analytical plane, offering a comprehensive examination of the two aesthetic modalities through which literariness is transformed in cross-media translation, as well as their respective operational mechanisms. Dance drama constructs a spatialized and visualized translational system centered on "bodily poetics," reshaping literary narration into

synchronous visual images. Opera, by contrast, forms a temporal and structured system grounded in "vocal drama," achieving auditory aesthetic experience through the temporal unfolding of literary emotional cores.

Despite differences in media characteristics and expressive means, both forms accomplish an innovative translation and aesthetic elevation of the core content of red classic literature. Through a dual analytical framework of "body-sound," this study provides a comprehensive theoretical model for understanding how literariness can be preserved and developed across artistic forms governed by different sensory modalities. Furthermore, effective cross-media transformation cannot rely merely on the transplantation of literary content; rather, it must adhere to the intrinsic properties of each medium, transforming literariness into stage-specific aesthetic forms. In doing so, it offers theoretically grounded and practically meaningful pathways for the contemporary revitalization of red classics, the innovative development of stage art, and the localized application of cross-media theory.

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