

Original Paper

A Study of the Contract Spirit in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

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Abstract

As a famous playwright and one of the most remarkable literary figures in Britain and the world, Shakespeare is the master of humanist literature in the European Renaissance. The Merchant of Venice is one of his the most representative of works. In this play, a conflict arose from different laws: that is Roman law and Christian law. Shakespeare depicts two laws together perfectly. The spirit of contract and Shakespeare's humanist ideas are profoundly reflected throughout the play. Shakespeare achieved his desired humanist sentiment while complying with the social and legal system of Venice. The spirit of contract plays quite an important role in social relations. This paper will explore the spirit of contract from three aspects in The Merchant of Venice: family relationships, individual relationships, and societal and individual relationships. It aims to analyze the essence of Shakespeare's contract spirit, understand the Western countries in the dialectical way and recognize the spiritual essence of Western people.

Keywords

Shakespeare, contract spirit, The Merchant of Venice, family relationships, individual relationships, social relationships

1. The Introduction

1.1 The Briefness of Contract

The word “Contract” first appeared in ancient period of Roman, where Roman law was initially proposed as the rudiments of the ancient laws. “Contracts in Roman law can be divided into two main categories: formal and informal” (David, 2004, p. 77). The former is a strict contract, the terms of which have to be strictly interpreted. On the contrary, the latter is a contract of different form, depending on the specific circumstances. There are many types of the latter contracts such as loans and pledges. Contracts arise in exchange. Or in other words, similar to leases, contracts must arise from agreements. The enforceability of these contracts depends on whether it meets the legal definition of a particular contract. This means that a contract is an agreement that is as strictly valid and unbreakable as the law. As a result of the Renaissance and the revival of Roman law, many European people began to study deeply and research Roman law. As the rules of contract became more and more important in European countries, the thought of contract became more and more known and spread. Contracts were first used in the legal and economic fields. As time went on, they were used in politics, religion, morality etc., and gradually became a standard and a tool for binding and regulating people’s behavior.

1.2 The Development of Contract Thought

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus explained and illustrated the thought of the Western social contract. Epicurus believed that life was a state of being undisturbed by the outside world. Everything was based on people’s happiness, including the creation of the state and the conclusion of the social contract. To guarantee people’s safety and to avoid people from hurting each other in the state of nature, the contract was not to be broken after it was signed. In *The Essential Epicurus: Letters, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*,

“It is impossible for the one who commits some act in secret violation of the compacts made among men not to do harm or to be harmed, to remain confident that he will escape notice, even if for the present he escapes detection a thousand times. For right up to the day of his death, it remains unclear whether he will escape detection” (Epicurus, 1993, p. 74).

The state and the law were established with the aim of the benefit of man. It greatly guaranteed the rights of man and the freedom to be happy.

In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes defined a contract as “The mutual transferring of right is that which men call contract” (Thomas, 1651, p. 82). He believed that in a state of nature, people’s selfishness and aggression can lead to conflicts and wars, so public power was needed to deter people. In a state of war, people needed to protect themselves from harm and avoid competing with each other and killing each other. People began to sign contracts, voluntarily gave up their rights, and submitted to the whole.

The British philosopher John Locke posited that a state of nature is characterized by perfect freedom, equality and peace. Individuals would establish a government together to safeguard their property rights of themselves. But the contract for the establishment of a state can only be established with the

approval of the people. In *Two Treatises of Government*, “The supreme power cannot take from any man any part of his property without his own consent” (John, 1988, p. 360). In other words, people had always retained their right to life, liberty, and property in order not to be attacked by anyone or to be subjected to the machinations of legislators.

The Social Contract, a work by the eminent French ideologist Jean-Jacques Rousseau published in 1762, firmly established its writer’s significant position within Western contractual thought. Rousseau believed that the state of nature under the primitive society was peaceful. Each person was independent, equal, free, and kind. However, people would resent each other because of inequality and break this ideal state of nature. To eliminate this inequality, people needed to make a social contract. Chapter six of *The Social Contract* states that “The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before” (Rousseau, 2013, p. 25). The social contract was created to solve this problem. Each signer of the contract was required to cede all his natural rights to a whole, not to other signers of the contract. At the same time, the whole was strong enough to protect each individual. In other words, people got the same thing from the concession as they gave up. The whole achieved its own unity, life and will from the act of signing a contract.

1.3 The Concept of the Spirit of Contract

In economy and life, the spirit of contract refers to the inherent spirit and awareness of people to respect rules and laws. On the one hand, the spirit of contract is reflected in private life. Especially in the process of trading goods, the spirit of contract has a vital role in the development of the economy. On the other hand, on the social level, the spirit of contract guarantees that every social citizen has the rights of a human being. It has an important binding effect on the political, economic, and cultural life of people. A contract is established by the agreement of the contracting parties. Each contracting party should fulfill their respective rights and obligations, and they need to have the spirit of the contract. The spirit of contract binds people’s thoughts and behaviors. For example, personality, values, and integrity. Therefore, the spirit of contract also plays a very important role in maintaining social relations. The spirit of contract mainly includes the spirit of contract freedom, the spirit of contract equality, the spirit of contract faithfulness, and the spirit of contract relief.

The spirit of contract freedom refers to that the contracting parties are free to determine the specific content and the form in which the contract is to be presented. The contracting parties are free to conclude the terms of the contract, provide that the terms are not contrary to the law and the public interest. The parties can negotiate to change the contract or cancel it, as long as both or more parties agree.

The spirit of contract equality refers to that the contracting parties are on an equal footing. Regardless of the status and social position of the contracting parties before signing the contract, everything is

equal in the contract. This means that no one person has the right to demand that others obey him. The rights and obligations in the contract are reciprocal. This means that the parties receive remuneration or the results of their work roughly equal to the corresponding obligations they should fulfill.

The spirit of contract faithfulness is the most important thing the contracting parties should have, which is the first step in deciding whether the contract will be successful or not. This means that when deciding to enter into a contract, each person must not hide the facts and not use the contract to achieve private malicious acts. If a contract is entered into because either party does not keep its word, this will lead to the failure of the contract. The party who has broken the contract needs to pay damages to the injured party.

The spirit of contract relief focuses on the contracting party using the terms to achieve compensation for his or her loss. If the contracting party fails to abide by the content of the contract, resulting in financial and moral damages to the other party. The injured party can be compensated so that his or her interests can be best protected.

1.4 Renaissance Contract Thought

The Merchant of Venice was written by Shakespeare during the Renaissance. The idea of contract in the play was already formed in the Roman period. A contract signed based on the agreement of both or more parties has a legal effect. This means that the idea that people agree can determine the exact form and content of the contract. However, in contrast to the Roman law, which was unforgiving, the Christian law was to love others as yourself.

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these”
(King, 1987, p. 436).

Jesus identified loving others as yourself as the general outline of the law. It is the collision of the two incompatible laws that give rise to the idea of covenant in the play. In the play, Shakespeare fulfills the Christian purpose of mercy within the reasonable limits of Roman law. That is to say, the conflict and integration that arise through secular and religious laws are reflected in the social contract. In the Renaissance, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare establishes that the true sense of the contract is a spiritual contract that is not bound by the secular. Shakespeare's humanist thought is reflected here at its best.

2. Overview

At present, many scholars study *The Merchant of Venice* mainly from the aspects of analyzing characters, religious conflicts, women's status, economy, law, and so on. However, for the discussion of the spirit of contract in the play, many scholars analyze the contract from the law. Therefore, analyzing the spirit of contract from the perspective of literature has exerted much research space.

2.1 *The Studies at abroad*

Foreign researcher Caroline B. Ward at Claremont McKenna College argues that commerce drives the play, reflecting personal motivations and subordination in the different characters' business approaches, revealing the nature of the complex conflicts in the play (Ward, 2016). Baldo and Jonathan's paper in *The Journal Multicultural Shakespeare* shows that a foreign businessman's sense of foreignness can promote national consciousness and pride. However, Shakespeare indirectly uses the foreign not to unify but to reveal the divisions within England's economic values and culture (Baldo & Jonathan, 2016). RM Schwartz published *The Price of Justice and Love in The Merchant of Venice* in *The Journal of African Studies & Development* in 2006, which points out that many of the difficult issues once are solved by religion, like justice and love. They are adopted by secular cultural forms such as the courtroom and the stage. Both love and justice are influenced by the modern idea of contract (Schwartz, 2006). Han believes that the contradiction in play is the confrontation of two kinds of capital, the opposition of two kinds of religious belief, and the conflict of two kinds of ethical belief (Han, 2002). Lee Trepanier argues that Venice is a city of commerce and contracts. The relationship among is only established based on the transaction among people. Friendship, love, and commerce are based on profit (Trepanier, 2014).

2.2 *The Studies at home*

In China scholars have focused the studies of politics, economics, culture, social regime etc., in *The Merchant of Venice*. It illustrates the economic policy, not a modern legal system based on the principles of individual rights and equality. Instead of being a perfect means to ensure a harmonious society, the law in the drama is often manipulated as a tool of revenge (Feng, 2013). Law is an instrument of revenge, a guarantee of economic prosperity, and a weapon to save lives (Feng & Xu, 2014). The analysis of the concept of law in the city of *The Merchant of Venice* is considered from various perspectives, including political, religious, moral, and social issues (Feng, 2014). In Venice, a city with a strong commercial culture, people reject non-contractual and immoral behavior. The spirit of contract has positive enlightenment significance to the construction of an honest society (Zhang, 2015). Zhang Fulin believes that the social contract that can be accepted by all members of society should insist on ethnic equality and respect the freedom of religious belief. If the ethnic groups are not equal, then society will inevitably appear oppression and hatred between ethnic groups (Zhang, 2011).

To sum up, the spirit of contract is reflected in literature because it is inevitably present in all aspects of life and influences the development of life and society. Therefore, it is especially important and meaningful to study the spirit of contract in the field of literature. As the member of society, it is impossible to avoid establishing sociable relationships with others. Besides, establishing a good social relationship requires the joint role of every member of society. Therefore, the spirit of contract plays an important role in the interaction and composition of society. This paper will explore the spirit of contract in *The Merchant of Venice*, mainly analyzing the spirit of contract in family relationships,

relationships between individuals, and social and personal relationships in the play, to better explore the essence of the Western spirit of contract and to understand the essence of the spirit of Western people in a dialectical way.

3. Contract Spirit of Family Relationships

3.1 Marriage Relationships

Marriage is explicitly mentioned in Roman law as being more of a secular issue than a religious one. A valid marriage must include both of the following. “First, there must be capacity, provided the marriage did not fall within the prohibited degrees of relationship. Second, there must be consent by the parties to the marriage” (David, 2004, p. 33-34). Marriage and contract reflect consistency in principles, such as the principles of equality and voluntariness. In other words, the establishment of the relationship between husband and wife is entirely at the discretion of the parties. Both parties have the right to choose the person they marry, and the relationship is established as long as they mutually agree on it.

3.1.1 Freedom spirit of Contract

Bassanio was a rich family man who had fallen through the cracks. He maintained a luxurious life by borrowing money. When he owed too much debt to pay, he tried to adopt marriage to change his current financial situation. In *Act I, Scene I*, it reads, “But my chief care is to come fairly off from the great debts” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 109). “In Belmont is a lady richly left” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 111). Portia’s father left a will that Portia’s future husband needed to be determined by lottery. Portia said that the Neapolitan prince’s greatest skill was to put shoes on horses. County Palatine was young and sad. French lord, Monsieur le Bon had no character of his own. Falconbridge, the young baron of England was attired strange. Scottish lord didn’t know how to get along with others. The young German, the Duke of Saxony’s nephew addicted to wine. Portia talked about their shortcomings one by one. It was not until Nerissa mentioned the Venetian Bassanio who was a man of scholar and soldier. “He of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon was the best deserving a fair lady” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 117). Instead of being critical, Portia agreed with Nerissa of honor's compliment to him.

Portia’s marriage was to be decided by her father’s will, and she could not choose her husband, which was against the spirit of freedom of marriage. Bassanio was able to be appreciated by Portia among these available choices. Fortunately, the box was chosen by Bassanio and no one made any changes to the three boxes during this period. Their love was fated, which shows that Portia was fortunate to have a satisfying love under the control of her father’s authority. Among these available candidates, Bassanio was the perfect one. Even though Bassanio’s initial intentions were for money. They both had their purposes while having good feelings for each other. In addition, two other couples were also pursuing a free marriage. Nerissa and Graziano fell in love at first sight, and Jessica and Lorenzo crossed race and religion to fall in love. If marriage was compared to a contract, then they both possessed the spirit of

freedom.

3.1.2 Equality Spirit of Contract

In a marriage relationship, both husband and wife should support each other. It contains both material and moral support. However, at the social level, the relationship between men and women was not equal between marriages. During the Renaissance, the status of women was improved to some extent. “However, the legal protection women received at that time was obtained under the gender cultural mechanism of gender inequality and did not change their legal weak status” (Yi, 2009). The patriarchal nature of Italian society did not change, traditional gender relations persisted, and women’s worth and dignity were not fully recognized. In the play, Portia gave Bassanio monetary help when Antonio was in trouble. When Bassanio picked the box before, Portia guided him to make his choice. When he succeeded in his selection, Portia was very happy and boldly confessed her love to Bassanio. In addition, Portia dressed up as a doctor of law in court and relied on her wisdom to save her husband’s friend from a crisis. However, Bassanio’s behavior and attitude disappointed his wife. As mentioned in the court of *Act IV*, “But life itself, my wife, and all the world, are not with me esteemed above thy life” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 202). It showed that the highest position in Bassanio’s heart was his friend, not his wife. In other words, Portia fully observed the spirit of marriage equality, and Bassanio did not respect his wife equally, violating the spirit of equality in marriage.

3.1.3 Faithfulness Spirit of Contract

In this marital relationship, Bassanio did not observe the spirit of faithfulness. In *Act III, Scene II*, Portia is mentioned as saying,

“I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love
And be my vantage to exclaim on you” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 172).

Bassanio responded with the promise but eventually broke the promise. In court, as a gift for the learned judge who saved his good friend Antonio. Bassanio at first hesitated but eventually gave the ring away. The ring was a symbol of their emotional contract, but Bassanio broke it. In terms of marital fidelity, Sherlock was particularly distressed by the jewels when he discovered that his daughter Jessica had stolen the money and jewels. Sherlock kept the spirit of faithfulness in marriage because the jewels were a symbol of the emotional contract he once had with his wife.

3.2 Father-daughter Relationship

There was no free choice in which family a child was born into. So, for Jessica, as the daughter of a Jew, there was simply no option for her. Shylock was harsh on his daughter and did not allow her to go out and socialize with Christians. Jessica said “I would not have my father see me in talk with thee” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 139). She didn’t even have the right to interact with others as she pleased, and didn’t even dare to let her father see her talking to a servant. Jessica was ashamed to be Sherlock’s

daughter. “To be ashamed to be my father’s child! But though I am a daughter to his blood, I am not to his manners” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 139). This shows that she is not a subordinate who is subservient to her father with no capability of judging right from wrong (Li & Ma, 2022). Chapter Two of *The First Societies in The Social Contract* states that “as soon as he reaches years of discretion, he is the sole judge of the proper means of preserving himself, and consequently becomes his own master” (Rousseau, 2013, p. 9). Faced with her father's coercive discipline and power over boundaries, Jessica has the ability and the right to rebel for her freedom. So, she finally fought her father in a way that pained him. She ran away with a Christian who was an enemy of her father, which symbolized the complete breakdown of the father-daughter relationship. The father’s over-regulation breaks the boundaries of maintaining a good relationship. Instead of respecting the father, the daughter feels shame and defiance. The equality of the relationship is also broken.

4. Contract Spirit of Interpersonal Relationships

4.1 Friend Relationships

Friendship is the affection and intimacy between friends. “It is recognized by both members of the relationship and is characterized by a bond or tie of reciprocated affection” (Wyndol et al., May 14, 2023). One-sided giving cannot be called friendship. People choose to establish a friendship with each other. It is not compulsory because there is no formal obligation or legal obligation to each other. This means that friendship is not based on a contract. It is equal in nature. In a friendship, each person has the same power or authority in the relationship.

4.1.1 Freedom Spirit of Contract

The choice between friends is free and there is no uniform standard for what it takes to be a friend. Antonio was a kind and generous man who never charged interest on the money he lent out. He made many sincere friends. In *Act I, Scene 1*, Antonio grieved and his friends expressed concern. Graciano advised him, “But fish not with this melancholy bait for this fool gudgeon” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 108). Antonio has sincere friends around him. In comparison, he identifies Bassanio only as his best friend. There are no certain criteria or conditions, it is entirely up to Antonio’s own choice. The same goes for Bassanio. This shows that friendship is built following the spirit of freedom.

4.1.2 Equality and Faithfulness Spirit of Contract

At first, their friendship is not considered equally. A person who establishes a friendship for other purposes is a violation of another person who is sincere about the friendship. Antonio seeks a friendship that is based on virtue rather than profit. In addition to being a friend, Antonio was Bassanio’s debtor. When Bassanio asked Antonio for a loan, he told the story of practicing shooting at school as a way to prove that he was a debtor who knew how to repay his debt. Bassanio treated Antonio more like he wanted his money. It was a friendship built on profit. However, he did not expect Antonio to be very trusting of him. To commit to friends, especially at the cost of life, sign a contract of

“a pound of flesh”. This showed that Antonio followed the spirit of faithfulness. When Sherlock kept asking to cut Antonio’s flesh, Bassanio made a series of responses, such as he reasoned with Sherlock, using three times the money to pay for his friend’s debt, and even praying to give up his life to save his friend:

“Antonio, I am married to a wife
Which is as dear to me as life itself;
But life itself, my wife, and all the world
Are not with me esteemed above thy life
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
Here to this devil, to deliver you” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 202).

At this time, Bassanio valued friendship to the extent that Antonio expected a friendship built on virtue. Their friendship was following the spirit of equality in the end.

4.1.3 Relief Spirit of Contract—Friendship and Marriage

Bassanio and Antonio’s friendship and Bassanio and Portia’s love deserve our attention. In these two relationships, Bassanio was at the center, and the other two were third parties in each relationship. Because Bassanio broke his contract with his wife by giving the ring away. In court, he prayed that he would rather give up his life and his wife’s life to save Antonio. Antonio becomes the third person in Portia’s relationship with Bassanio. Portia suffered spiritual betrayal from her husband. Then Portia was entitled to material or moral compensation from her husband. Portia actually got a remedy. That is to make Bassanio pay more attention to her, Portia made a threat to her husband. “Lie not a night from home; watch me like Argus. If you do not, if I be left alone. Now, by my honour, which is yet mine own, I’ll have that doctor for my bed fellow” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 224). Antonio acted as a guarantor. Bassanio and Portia renewed their contract in the true sense of the word. It meant that Portia won the spiritual relief that kept Bassanio from leaving her.

In the relationship between friends, Antonio was so dependent on and attached to friendship that he used it as a reason to cause conflict in Bassanio’s marriage. For Antonio, Portia was the third person. For example, In *Act IV, Scene I*, when Bassanio hesitated to send the judge the ring. Antonio said, “My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring. Let his deservings and my love withal be valued’ gainst your wife’s commandment” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 210). It was clear from his behavior that he believed that the friendship relationship between men was more important than the relationship between husband and wife. One of the reasons why Antonio believed this was because of the low esteem in which women were held in society. Portia’s status as a wife was not considered respectful enough in men’s hearts. On the other hand, Antonio valued the relationship between the two men with Bassanio as important, even above the love relationship between husband and wife. When Bassanio established a marriage relationship, the wife had to occupy a place in Bassanio’s life. To some extent from Antonio’s point of view, this was a violation of the supreme friendship. But the fact that Portia was the wife of

Antonio's friend, it would have been Antonio to obtain the relief of having his life saved in court.

4.2 Employment Relationships

There is a contractual relationship between master and servant, where the worker works and the employer pays accordingly. Equality in the employment relationship means that mentally, even though the social status of the servant is lower than that of the employer, the servant cannot be insulted or disrespected by the employer's personality, the employer cannot lack to pay the servant's salary. The servant does his share of work well, and his labor and reward should be proportional. Lancelot worked as a servant in Shylock's house, and he was often criticized by his Jewish master for his hard work. As mentioned in Chapter Four *Slavery in The Social Contract*, "To say that a man gives himself gratuitously, is to say what is absurd and inconceivable; such an act is null and illegitimate" (Rousseau, 2013, p. 17). Therefore, even if the servant is paid to work, the master's oppression will make the servant work reluctantly. Contrary to Shylock, Bassanio was a kind man who would reward his servants with beautiful new clothes. Both materially and spiritually, the servant would seek better treatment whenever possible. "The old proverb is very well parted between my master Shylock and you, sir: you have the grace of God, sir, and he hath enough" (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 136). Then Bassanio prepared new clothes for him and became a new master of Lancelot. Lancelot desired respect for his personality from his master, so Lancelot sought a better master and also got a better treatment. Thus, Lancelot went beyond the spirit of contract in the pursuit of equality in the employment relationship. What he desired was to realize his value and respect for his personality.

5. Contract Spirit of Social and Individual Relationships—Law and Judges

The core purpose of the law is fairness and justice, and the power of judges belongs within the law. Judges are loyal to the law, and their responsibility lies in upholding fairness and justice, and the dignity of the law. As Ronald said, "The most popular opinion, insists that judges should always, in every decision, follow the law rather than try to improve upon it" (Ronald, 1986, p. 8). The attitude of the judge, as the executor of power, can only be neutral as well. A fair trial cannot be affected by subjective consciousness. In the play, two judges appeared on the court. Duke and the Portia, they both recognized the validity of the "a pound of flesh" contract, and their purpose was the same: to save Antonio. In Venetian law at the time, the pound of flesh contract was indeed valid and effective. But Duke did not acknowledge the validity of the deed to the crowd. He exhorted the Jews in a Christian tone "We all expect a gentle answer, Jew" (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 189). "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?" (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 192). He chose the former between benevolent Christian law and rigorous Roman law. This was a clear violation of the judge's loyalty to the law. However, Portia admitted to all that the contract was valid. But she was also a loving Christian and initially hoped that the Jews would make concessions and be merciful. Since the Jews were determined to cut the flesh, Portia added a hidden condition: "Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more, But just a pound of

flesh” (Shakespeare, 2020, p. 204). Shylock’s final judgment was that half of the property would be forfeited and half would be paid to Antonio. Portia recognized the validity of the deed and indeed made the trial in compliance with the law, which was not broken the law. She uses the law to fight and save Antonio. Portia achieved mercy under the law that did not tolerate mercy. Behind the relationship between the judge and the law is implied the conflict between the Christian law and the secular law. In the midst of this confrontation is actually a confrontation between law and love.

6. Conclusion

The spirit of the contract is drawn from the combination of ancient Roman and Christian cultures. Shakespeare expresses the spirit of contract in its true sense in the play in family relationships, relationships between individuals, and social and individual relationships. In these relationships, each person has a different attitude toward the spirit of the contract: some people fully comply with the spirit of the contract, some people break the spirit of the contract, some people pursue the spirit of the contract, and some people go beyond the spirit of the contract. In Venice, the law is harsh, so kindness and love are not allowed in the legal system. When it comes to conflict resolution, Shakespeare perfectly integrates humanistic thoughts under the law of unforgiving law. Mercy and kindness are realized in the midst of fairness and justice. Shakespeare uses the law to defeat the law, which neither violated the law nor also advocated the spirit of humanism. Shakespeare re-established the spiritual contract between people’s relations in the true sense of the word under the premise of complying with secular laws. This is the embodiment of Shakespeare’s greatness and is worth learning about later generations.

The spirit of contract plays an important role in the interaction and composition of society. Maintaining a good social relationship requires the joint role of each member of society. Therefore, it makes sense for each individual to have a spirit of contract. The spirit of contract is the dominant spirit in Western countries, especially the spirit of freedom, equality, and faithfulness. These spirits also influence people’s reverence and pursuit of freedom and equality. Shakespeare’s idea of a contract is actually to realize the idea of humanism, which greatly safeguards human life and rights based on the observance of social laws.

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Note(s)

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