

## **A Philosophical Exploration of Cultural Values and Christian Metaphors of Redemption in Western Literary Classics**

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**Abstract:** This paper delves deeply into the Christian metaphors and the theme of redemption in Western literary classics. By analyzing classic works from different periods, it reveals their connotations, forms of expression, and influences on Western literary creation and culture. The study finds that Christian metaphors and the theme of redemption are presented in diverse forms in Western literary classics. From \*The Divine Comedy\* to modern literary works, they are shown in unique ways, reflecting the spiritual features of different eras. These themes have enriched the literary imagery and symbol system, shaped unique character images and spiritual worlds, constructed distinctive narrative structures, and deepened the themes of literary works. Culturally, they reflect the values and belief systems of Western culture, reveal the historical changes and spiritual crises of Western society. From a cross - cultural perspective, they have both differences and commonalities with themes in Eastern literature, and have important implications for contemporary literary creation, cultural exchanges, and the spiritual pursuits of humanity.

**Keywords:** Western Literary Classics; Christian Metaphors; Theme of Redemption; Cultural Interpretation; Influence on Literary Creation

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

As the core spiritual pillar of Western culture, Christianity has had a profound impact on the development of Western literature (Tracy, 1978). Since its birth in Palestine in the first century A.D. and its spread to the West, its teachings, stories, and values have been deeply integrated into Western literature, becoming an important source and spiritual core of creation. In the Middle Ages, Christianity was dominant, and literature became a vassal of its spread. Church literature flourished, using biblical stories, biographies of saints, and other genres to propagate religious doctrines and lead people to faith in God. The Bible provided rich material and inspiration for later literature, and Christian metaphors and symbols, such as the cross-symbolizing salvation and the lamb symbolizing purity and obedience, were widely used in literature and became an important way to express religious ideas and spiritual pursuits (Kuczok, 2020). During the

Renaissance, the rise of humanism impacted the authority of Christianity, but Christian culture still occupied an important position in literary creation. Many writers fused Christian elements with the spirit of humanism, expressing a desire for salvation and concern for the fate of mankind through the exploration of human nature and the critique of social reality. Dante's *Divine Comedy* takes the Christian framework of hell, purgatory and heaven to show the process of human beings seeking salvation in the choice between good and evil, in which Virgil symbolizes reason and Beatrice symbolizes faith, reflecting the profound influence of Christianity on the human spiritual world. In modern times, Christian culture has continued to influence Western literature. The writers explore the connotation of Christian metaphors and redemption themes from multiple perspectives and rich techniques, and closely integrate them with social reality and human nature (Gomola, 2010). Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" shows the struggle and redemption of human nature through the experience of Hester Brand, and the scarlet letter "A" transforms from a mark of shame to a starting point for self-redemption, profoundly reflecting the influence of Christian culture on Western literature. It is of great significance to study the presentation of Christian metaphors and the theme of redemption in Western literary classics. It is helpful to understand the development context and cultural connotation of Western literature, reveal its ideology, aesthetics and value orientation in different periods, and grasp the logic of development. It can enhance the understanding of Western culture, Christianity has shaped the values of Westerners, etc., and analyze the Christian elements in literary works, which can deeply understand the spiritual core of Western culture and promote cultural exchanges. It also has an enlightening effect on literary creation and criticism, providing materials and ideological connotations for creation, inspiring writers to create from the perspectives of human nature, morality, and faith, providing new perspectives and methods for literary criticism, and helping to interpret literary works more deeply (Leeman, 1989).

## 2. RELATED RESEARCH

Although the study of Christian elements in Western literature in China started late, it has developed rapidly in recent years and achieved considerable results. Most of the early research focused on the macro influence of Christian culture on the development of Western literature (Gomola, 2018). For example, in *The Influence of Christian Culture on*

Western Literature, Zhao Lin systematically sorted out the infiltration and shaping of Christian culture into Western literary themes, images, and values in various historical periods from ancient times to modern times, and pointed out that its teachings, stories, and symbols are the unique cultural identifiers of Western literature, which provide rich materials for creation. This macro perspective helps to grasp the overall connection and historical context of the two. With the deepening of research, more and more scholars pay attention to the themes of Christian metaphor and redemption in the works of specific writers. In studying Dante's *Divine Comedy*, scholars dissect the metaphors of hell, purgatory, and paradise, as well as the protagonist's redemptive journey, revealing the influence of Christian faith on Dante's work and his thoughts on human fate and redemption. In studying Milton's *Paradise Lost*, scholars explore the doctrines and concepts of salvation behind God, Satan, and the human figure, and analyze how Milton used it to express praise for God, reflection on the fall of man, and a desire for redemption. Some scholars have studied the similarities and differences between Christian elements in Western literature and traditional Chinese culture from the perspective of cultural comparison (Gunton, 2003). By comparing the differences between biblical stories and ancient Chinese myths and legends in terms of values, narrative methods and cultural connotations, this paper explores people's different understandings of the world, humanity and salvation in different cultural contexts, and provides a new perspective for examining the cultural exchanges and collisions between China and the West. Foreign research in this field has a long history, and a mature research system and methods have been formed. In Western academic circles, Christian culture is regarded as the core of Western culture, and related studies have always been an important field of literary studies. The New Criticism in the field of literary criticism focused on the close reading of texts and the analysis of language, imagery, and symbolism of literary works, providing an important method for the study of Christian metaphors (Gomola, 2016). In *The Exquisite Urn: A Study of Poetic Structure*, Brooks reveals the complex imagery and symbolic meaning of the poetic text through the interpretation of the text, including the analysis of Christian metaphors, emphasizing that these elements are an important means for poets to express their thoughts and emotions, which is helpful to deeply understand the connotation of poetry and explore the deep meaning and artistic value of Christian metaphors (Konsmo, 2010). Cultural studies scholars focus on the historical evolution of Christian culture in Western society and its influence on literary creation. In *The Theory of Western Literature* in the

Twentieth Century, Eagleton explores the relationship between literature and society, history and culture, analyzes the profound influence of Christian culture on the direction and value orientation of Western literature, and reveals its inheritance and evolution in Western literature and its role in shaping society and culture through the analysis of literary works in different periods. Religious scholars interpret the Christian elements in literary works from the perspective of religious doctrine and theological thought, and explore their relationship with religious beliefs (Konsmo, 2010). In Cultural Theology, Tillich proposed that "culture is the manifestation of religion, and religion is the substance of culture", emphasizing that literary works contain religious elements and spiritual connotations, and that the status and role of religious belief in human culture can be understood through the interpretation of works, which provides theoretical support for the study of the religious connotation of Christian elements.

### 3. THE PRESENTATION OF CHRISTIAN METAPHORS AND THE THEME OF REDEMPTION IN WESTERN LITERARY CLASSICS

Christian metaphors and themes of redemption are presented in Western literary canons as spiritual maps that transcend time and space, through the hell of the Divine Comedy - purgatory The metaphorical system of the Three Realms of Heaven, the death imagery and confessional monologue of Hamlet, the guilt psychology and religious redemption path of Crime and Punishment, and the letter symbols and moral purification process of The Scarlet Letter construct a multi-dimensional interpretive space from theocratic redemption to individual awakening, from social criticism to existential dilemma (Okpeh, 2017). These literary classics use core imagery such as the cross, the Holy Grail, and the lamb as carriers to transform the Christian doctrine of original sin, confession , and redemption into concrete narrative dynamics, reflecting both the torture of the soul under theocracy in the Middle Ages and the awakening of human nature in the Renaissance,<sup>19</sup> The social and moral crisis of the century also reflects the spiritual breakthrough of human beings in the absurdity and alienation of modern society. The continuity of this theme not only shapes the unique symbolic system and narrative structure of Western literature, but also becomes an important code for interpreting the genes of Western culture through philosophical inquiries about the good and evil of human nature,

the nature of belief and the meaning of existence, and becomes an important code for interpreting the genes of Western culture, Comparative of the Phased Characteristics of the Theme of Redemption was shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of the Phased Characteristics of the Theme of Redemption

Historical Period	Theological Foundation	Core of Redemption	Literary Vehicles	Typical Metaphors
Middle Ages	Doctrine of Original Sin	Redemption by Divine Right	<i>The Divine Comedy, The Pilgrim's Progress</i>	Purgatorial purification, Eucharistic ceremony
Renaissance	Humanism	Individual Awakening and Moral Redemption	<i>Hamlet, Don Quixote</i>	Confessional monologues, Chivalric spirit
Enlightenment	Rationalism	Redemption through Social Contract	<i>Faust</i>	Exploration of knowledge, Symbol of contract
19th Century	Religious Skepticism	Sense of Guilt and Forgiveness	<i>Crime and Punishment, The Scarlet Letter</i>	Criminal psychology, Alphabetic symbols
Modern Era	Existentialism	Spiritual Redemption in Absurdity	Works of Kafka and Camus	Maze imagery, Silent God

### 3.1 Presentation in Medieval Literature

#### 3.1.1 Christian Metaphors and the Journey of Redemption in the Divine Comedy

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the pinnacle of medieval literature, vividly presents Christian metaphors and themes of redemption with its unique structure and profound connotation. The epic takes Dante's soul journey as a clue, taking the reader through the three realms of hell, purgatory, and heaven, revealing the difficult journey of soul redemption. Depicted as an abyss of pain and torment, Hell is divided into nine levels in the shape of a funnel, each corresponding to a different sin and punishment, and contains profound Christian metaphors (Richardson, 2012). The first level of Limbo imprisoned the pagans who were born before Christ, and because they had not been baptized, although they had no specific crimes, they could only

wander on the edge of darkness, a metaphor for the confusion and helplessness of human beings outside of faith. The second to ninth levels punish the souls who are guilty of lust, gluttony, greed, anger, cults, rape, fraud, betrayal, etc., and each level of punishment vividly symbolizes the harm of the corresponding sins, such as the lustful person being swept by the wind, symbolizing that he is at the mercy of desire; The betrayer is frozen in ice, symbolizing inner coldness and betrayal of trust (Campanella, 2011). Purgatory, or the Pure Realm, is a place of soul purification, which is also divided into nine levels, corresponding to sins such as arrogance, jealousy, and anger. The sins of the soul here are relatively light and repentant, and they are cleansed and tempered through punishments related to sins, gradually eliminating sins and elevating the soul realm. For example, the arrogant carry a heavy stone on their backs in order to learn to be humble; The eyes of the jealous are sewn with wire sewn in order to learn to look at themselves and others. With the purification of the soul, they gradually approached Paradise on earth, symbolizing the relative purity of the soul. Here, Dante meets Beatrice, a symbol of divine revelation and guidance, suggesting that faith and divine guidance are indispensable on the road to salvation. Heaven is the abode of God and angels, divided into nine levels, inhabited by different types of do-gooders, full of light, harmony and love. The higher up it goes, the closer the soul is to God. At the highest level of heaven, Dante sees the radiance of God, symbolizing the unity of the soul with God after suffering and eternal happiness and peace. Through Dante's travels, the Divine Comedy vividly shows the process of soul redemption, which is not only the purification and sublimation of the individual soul, but also a profound reflection on the fate and redemption of mankind. It transforms the abstract concept of Christian teachings that human beings fall into suffering due to original sin and obtain salvation through faith, repentance, punishment and purification, into concrete literary images and plots, allowing readers to intuitively feel the power and meaning of redemption (Ward, 1982).

### 3.1.2 Metaphor and Redemptive Expressions in Medieval Mystic Literature

Medieval mystic literature is a unique presentation of Christian culture in the field of literature, which expresses the desire and pursuit of redemption in a deep and mysterious way, as shown in Table 2. In medieval Europe, Christianity was dominant, and mysticism, as a spiritual pursuit and practice within Christianity, attracted many believers and monks. Through the practice of mysticism, they sought intimacy with God and spiritual experience, a spiritual quest that is fully embodied in literature.

Table 2: The Metaphorical System of the Three Realms in *The Divine Comedy*

<b>Spatial Dimension</b>	<b>Human Nature Reflection</b>	<b>Redemption Mechanism</b>	<b>Dante's Theological Reflections</b>
Hell	The Seven Deadly Sins	Eternal Punishment	Rational criticism and the irresistibility of divine will
Purgatory	Moral Cultivation	Confessional Purification	The combination of free will and divine grace
Heaven	Divine Sublimation	Union with Divine Love	Mysticism and ultimate truth

Medieval mystic literature often used metaphors to express the mystical union of the soul with God and the yearning for salvation. In the work, God is depicted as a divine being beyond human comprehension, like a radiant sun illuminating the world, or like an endless abyss containing infinite mysteries. The soul is likened to a wanderer who longs to return home, seeking a connection with God for salvation and peace in his earthly wanderings. The work of the Holy Maiden Hildegard is a typical example of this literature, whose writings are rich in illusions and metaphors, blending divinity and humanity to reveal a profound experience of a mysterious existence. Among them, the image of light appears frequently, and the light symbolizes divinity, representing the brilliance of God and the revelation of truth. She describes her trance-like vision of a dazzling light full of love and power, and a sense of God's presence and favor, which is a metaphor for the soul being gradually illuminated and guided by God's light in its quest for salvation. The poetry of St. John the Cross Ascetic is equally profoundly an expression of salvation in mystic literature. He uses a lot of metaphors and symbols to compare the soul to the bride and God to the bridegroom, depicting the soul burning in love for God and longing to be united with it, just as the bride longs to be with the bridegroom. In his poems, the soul undergoes a dark journey to be united with God, encountering temptations and trials along the way, but it is these tribulations that purify the soul and finally achieve mystical union with God and salvation (Kuczok, 2010). In addition, mystic literature often combines metaphor with natural elements to illustrate salvation. Water symbolizes purification and rebirth, and the baptism of the soul in water means washing away sins and gaining rebirth; Fire represents passion and purifying power, and burning the soul in fire means removing impurities to achieve purity. These metaphors of natural elements make the theme of redemption more vivid, making it easier for readers to understand and feel the religious emotions in it. In short, mystic literature provided medieval people with a unique way of spiritual sustenance and redemption through the metaphor of the mysterious union of the soul and God and the

depiction of the redemption process, enriched the connotation of medieval literature, had a profound impact on later literature and thought, and stimulated people's in-depth thinking about religion, spirituality and the meaning of human existence (McDonald, 1978).

### 3.2 Presentation in Renaissance Literature

#### 3.2.1 Christian Metaphors and Character Redemption in Hamlet

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was written between the late 16th and 17th centuries. At the beginning of the Renaissance, humanism was prevalent, but Christian culture still had a profound impact on society. This classic is rich in Christian metaphors and themes of redemption, giving it a deep spiritual connotation. In the play, Christian imagery and metaphors are used throughout. The ghost imagery is far-reaching, with the ghost of Hamlet's father appearing to tell the truth about his murder and demand revenge. In Christian culture, ghosts are manifestations of the soul and are closely associated with the soul's destiny and salvation. The appearance of this ghost symbolizes the mysterious power, breaks the calm of reality, gives revenge mission, hints at the uneasiness of the soul after death and the desire for justice, and raises Hamlet's revenge to a religious and moral level, which is related to the salvation of the soul and the service of justice (Kuczok, 2010). Death imagery is also frequent, such as the death of Hamlet's father and Ophelia's drowning. In Christianity, death is the end of life and the judgment of the soul, and there is no escape. These scenes of death show the fragility of life and symbolize the suffering of human sin on earth and the urgent need for redemption. The drowning picture of Ophelia is a metaphor for her helplessness and longing for redemption in reality, and it also prompts Hamlet to think deeply about the meaning of life and the way to salvation. In the process of revenge, Hamlet always thinks about the salvation of the soul, and his heart is complex and profound. His classic monologue, "To live or to perish, it's a question worth considering", is not a simple choice of life and death, but a deep exploration of the salvation of the soul. Based on the Christian doctrine that suicide is a grave sin and life is a gift from God, Hamlet faced pain and pressure, and once had suicidal thoughts, but finally chose to survive, reflecting his respect for the doctrine and the pursuit of soul salvation, and he knew the connection between the mission of revenge and the salvation of souls (Neumann, 2012). When taking revenge, he constantly considers the justice and morality of revenge, fearing that he will lose the chance of redemption if he falls into sin, and sees Claudius giving up assassination when he prays, hoping that Claudius will increase his sin to the first degree



before taking action to achieve true justice, which reflects his deep understanding of Christian morality and justice and his dedication to the salvation of souls. In addition, by reflecting on the weakness and sin of human nature, such as Claudius's greed and cruelty, and the hypocrisy and indifference of those around him, he pursued the salvation of the soul more firmly in the midst of disappointment and pain, hoping to break the world of sin and find a way of salvation for himself and others.

### 3.2.2 Elements of Metaphor and Redemption in Cervantes' Work

Cervantes' *Don Quixote* was written in the early 17th century, at a time when Spanish society was in turmoil and change, and Christian culture, which was a spiritual pillar, was facing the onslaught of new ideas. This literary masterpiece presents Christian metaphor and redemption elements with a unique narrative style and profound connotation. *Don Quixote* was obsessed with chivalric fiction, embraced chivalry as a belief in chivalry, and was determined to save the world by doing chivalrous deeds, and his image can be seen as a Christian believer in the quest for salvation. In Christian culture, chivalry is closely linked to doctrine, and knighthood symbolizes justice, bravery, and loyalty, and is tasked with protecting the weak and defending the faith. *Don Quixote's* quest is a metaphor for believers' belief in God and their desire for salvation, and he tries to practice Christian values in order to achieve the salvation of the soul (Mosedale, 1997). He treats windmills as giants, sheep as armies, and inns as castles, all of which seem absurd and contain profound metaphors. The windmill symbolizes the evil forces in the world, and his battle with the windmill is a metaphor for the struggle against evil, and is an effort to pursue justice and redemption; The idea of the flock as an army alludes to his desire for the power of justice and his unwavering belief in the cause of redemption; Seeing the inn as a castle reflects his yearning for an ideal world and his desire to find a pure land in the world of sin to achieve salvation.

*Don Quixote's* adventures are significant for self and social redemption. In terms of self-redemption, although he constantly encountered the cruelty and failure of reality, he always adhered to his faith and pursuit, and in getting along with Sancho, he drew strength from Sancho's simple realization, recognized his own shortcomings, learned to face reality, no longer blindly pursued illusory ideals, and achieved self-growth and redemption, this self-perception transformation symbolizes his progress on the road to redemption. From the perspective of social redemption, his adventure is a critique and reflection on the social injustice, corruption and

moral decay of the time. His seemingly absurd behavior reveals social problems and people's numbness, reminding people of the importance of faith and moral strength, and that only a return to Christian values can achieve social salvation and harmony. His persistent pursuit of chivalry symbolizes the yearning for a better social order, hoping to arouse people's conscience and sense of justice, and regain lost morality and faith.

### 3.3 Presentation in 19th-Century Literature

Christian metaphors and themes of redemption in 19th-century literature present a deep dual dimension of social criticism and individual spiritual awakening, as shown in Table 3. Dostoevsky's confrontation between Raskolnikov's "superman theory" and religious salvation in *Crime and Punishment* juxtaposes the metaphor of axe (violence) and biblical (faith) to reveal the difficult process of moral disorder and faith reconstruction caused by the expansion of reason; Sonia carries the image of a lamb redeemer as a prostitute, and her exhortation and companionship constitute a modern version of the "Way of the Cross". Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" uses multiple metaphors of the "A" symbol (the symbol of adultery → the symbol of power → the incarnation of angels) to show the dialectical relationship between human repression and moral rebirth in Puritan society. Secularized translation of imagery. Together, the two works construct a paradigm of redemption unique to 19th-century literature: the transformation of the Christian view of original sin into a critique of social alienation, in which salvation no longer relies on the manifestation of charisma, but is achieved through the spiritual nirvana of the individual in guilt and forgiveness, which both perpetuates religious traditions and infuses modern reflections on the complexity of human nature (Kuczok, 2017).

Table 3: Comparison of Redemption Modes in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Scarlet Letter*

Dimension	Raskolnikov in <i>Crime and Punishment</i>	Hester Prynne in <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>
Source of Sin	Rational Inflation (Superman Theory)	Human Instinct (Sin of Adultery)
Redemption Path	Religious Confession+ Guidance of Sonya	Social Service + Self- Moral Improvement
Metaphorical Symbols	Axe (Violence), Bible (Faith)	Scarlet Letter "A" (Adultery), Embroidery (Creativity)
Redemption Outcome	Spiritual Purification but Still Punished	Spiritual Sublimation with Physical Demise

### 3.3.1 Sin, Redemption and Christian Metaphors in Crime and Punishment

In the sixties of the 19th century, Russia was in a period of social transition, and the abolition of serfdom brought about a series of problems, people's spiritual confusion, and traditional moral and religious concepts were questioned. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* came into being, which profoundly reflected the social reality of the time and the spiritual struggle of the people. Raskolnikov, the protagonist of the novel, is a poor college student, influenced by both Napoleonic "superman" theory and Christian teachings, and his heart is full of contradictions. Driven by poverty and "superman" theories, he murders an old loan shark in order to prove himself. After committing the crime, he fell into painful self-blame, and his conscience and sense of morality constantly tormented him, prompting him to reflect and seek redemption. Sonia is a highly symbolic character in the novel, born in poverty and reduced to a prostitute, but she is kind, forgiving, believing in God, and sticking to the Christian spirit of salvation. After Raskolnikov confessed to his crimes, she accepted him with love and tolerance, persuaded him to surrender and accept punishment, and to wash away his sins by suffering, practicing the Christian doctrine of "loving neighbors" and "tolerating sins". Under her guidance, Raskolnikov gradually realized the sin, began to reflect on the theory of "superman", and became aware of the responsibility for individual actions. Sonia also accompanied him to Siberia for hard labor, supporting him with faith and love and leading him to the path of salvation. She symbolizes the Christian redeemer, showing that those who sincerely repent and accept punishment have the opportunity to be saved. Through Raskolnikov's journey of crime and redemption and the portrayal of Sonya, *Crime and Punishment* deeply presents the themes of Christian metaphor and redemption, revealing the complex fragility of human nature, highlighting people's desire for salvation under social pressure, and exploring the meaning and value of Christian doctrine in modern society (Bergdahl, 2007).

### 3.3.2 The Original Sin, Repentance, and Redemption Metaphors in The Scarlet Letter

In the middle of the 19th century, the United States developed rapidly under the impetus of the Industrial Revolution, but there were also social problems such as moral decline, and Puritan thought still profoundly affected people's spiritual world. Set in New England, a 17th-century North American colony, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* focuses on humanity, morality, and redemption, and shows the influence of

Puritanism. Hester Brand, who fell in love with the priest Dimmesdale, had a daughter, but because her husband disappeared, she was convicted of adultery, and was convicted of wearing a scarlet "A", a symbol of shame, and living in the midst of public humiliation and discrimination. The scarlet letter "A" originally represented her sins and the oppressive punishment of society against her, and was the embodiment of the moral norms of Puritan society. However, Hester is not defeated by fate, and in the midst of her loneliness and pain, she strives to reflect on redemption by showing kindness and devotion to others. Over time, the metaphorical meaning of the red letter "A" has shifted, becoming a symbol of her courage in facing life and pursuing redemption. Hester's redemption process is full of painful struggles, social pressures and inner conflicts, both guilty of her crimes and difficult to let go of her feelings with Dimmesdale. But she insisted on making up for her mistakes through practical actions, and finally won people's respect and understanding and achieved self-redemption. This process embodies the Christian doctrine of repentance and redemption, which states that man repents of his original sin and receives God's forgiveness through good works (Cocks, 2000).

### 3.4 Presentation in Modern Literature

#### 3.4.1 Absurdity and Redemptive Metaphors in Kafka's Work

From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, under the influence of the Industrial Revolution and the two world wars, Western society was faced with problems such as a large gap between the rich and the poor, intensified class contradictions, and moral decay. Kafka's works are born in this context, revealing the existential dilemma and spiritual crisis of people in modern society in a unique and absurd way. In *The Metamorphosis*, the protagonist Gregor Samsa transforms into a beetle, a metaphor for the alienation of human beings in modern society. In a capitalist society, people are alienated into slaves to work in order to survive, losing themselves and humanity. Gregor's transformation and rejection by his family reflect the apathy and alienation of human relations and the loneliness and helplessness of the individual in modern society. The castle symbolizes social authority, rules and systems, and people's yearning for a better life, and K's struggle is a metaphor for the difficulties faced by human beings in the pursuit of ideals and freedom, reflecting people's helplessness in reality and their persistence in ideals. In Kafka's works, characters who yearn for salvation but find it difficult to achieve it, such as Joseph in *The Trial*. K was inexplicably arrested, running around but unable to get rid of the shadow of the trial, highlighting people's desire for

justice and fairness and helpless fear of fate in modern society, and profoundly reflecting the spiritual dilemma of people in modern society (Robertson, 2002).

3.4.2 Southern Society and Themes of Redemption in Faulkner's Work in the 20th century, due to the defeat of the Civil War, the traditional

Plantation economy collapsed, the social structure changed dramatically, traditional values and moral concepts were impacted, and people fell into spiritual confusion. Faulkner's works, set in the context of Southern society, are profound metaphors for the spiritual predicament of humanity. In "The Noise and the Tumult", the once-famous Compson family goes into decline, the members are selfish, greedy, and depraved, and the eldest son, Quentin, is deeply influenced by traditional values but cannot adapt to social change, and his incestuous feelings and suicidal behavior towards his sister reflect mental anguish, struggle, and longing for redemption. Absalom, Absalom! In Saddyburn's act of building an empire full of criminal violence and the eventual destruction of his family, it is a metaphor for the decay of southern society and the powerlessness of human beings to control their fate, and the characters continue to find a way to redemption in despair. In Faulkner's work, the search for redemption is an important theme. In "When I Am Dying", the Bendren family endures hardships during the funeral process after their mother's death, but they never give up their pursuit of redemption, and finally achieve self-redemption through reflection on their behaviors and values, showing the power of the characters to seek redemption in a sinful and depraved world (Kunkel, 1965).

#### 4. THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN METAPHOR AND THE THEME OF REDEMPTION ON WESTERN LITERARY CREATION

The Christian theme of metaphor and redemption has had a profound and multi-dimensional influence on Western literary creation, which not only shapes a unique system of artistic expression, but also deepens the spiritual connotation of literature, as shown in Table 4. At the level of imagery, religious symbols such as the cross, the Holy Grail, and the lamb are transformed into literary archetypes, such as the Three Realms structure of the Divine Comedy and the redemption narrative of Paradise Lost, constructing a symbolic network that transcends time and space. In terms

of character creation, from Jean Aogen in "Les Miserables" to Duke Mehygin in "The Idiot", the self-sacrifice of Christlike characters has become a moral benchmark, and their soul struggle and redemption process constitute the core of the narrative; At the structural level, the redemptive journey model pioneered by Pilgrim's Progress has been widely adopted by later writers, forming "original sin-awakening-redemption". The classic narrative paradigm. This kind of religious gene not only endows literary works with a transcendent spiritual height, but also makes Western literature always maintain a philosophical reflection on the essence of existence through the continuous questioning of the alienation of human nature and the crisis of faith, and becomes an eternal bridge between divinity and humanity, tradition and modernity.

Table 4: The Literary Evolution of Core Christian Imagery

<b>Imagery Symbols</b>	<b>Biblical Archetypes</b>	<b>Medieval Symbolism</b>	<b>Modern Reconstruction</b>
Lamb	Sacrificial Substitute	Embodiment of Purity	Symbol of the Vulnerable (e.g., <i>Boule de Suif</i> )
Cross	Sign of Redemption	Martyrdom Spirit	Existential Dilemma (e.g., <i>Waiting for Godot</i> )
Holy Grail	Blood of Christ	Knightly Pursuit	Nihilistic Symbol (e.g., <i>The Waste Land</i> )

#### 4.1 Enrich the Literary Imagery and Symbolic System

Christian imagery is widespread and deeply present in Western literature and is a key element of literary creation. As one of the core images of Western literature, the Holy Grail appears frequently in medieval literature and art, especially in Arthurian chivalric literature. In medieval chalice legends, the chalice is believed to be the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper, possessing magical powers that grant eternal life and infinite wisdom to its wielder. Chrétien's Parsifal inaugurates the motif of the search for the Holy Grail, in which the protagonist finds the Holy Grail and fulfills his mission, symbolizing noble ideals and spiritual pursuits. In Thomas Marlow's *The Death of King Arthur*, the Knights of the Round Table see the search for the Holy Grail as a symbol of supreme honor and spiritual achievement, not only representing the blood of Christ and the pursuit of the sacred, but also embodying the moral code of medieval knights, becoming their spiritual pillar in their quest for justice and truth (Waldron, 2020). The crown of thorns is also deeply symbolic, representing the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In literature, it is often used to highlight the great sacrifice of Jesus, to remind people of Jesus' selflessness

and the human desire for salvation. With the development of the times, the symbolism of these Christian imagery has been expanded and deepened. The Holy Grail is often regarded as a symbol of personal growth and self-realization in modern culture, and in science fiction and fantasy works, it is given a new connotation of exploring the unknown and transcending reality. The symbolism of the crown of thorns also extends from Jesus' personal suffering to human suffering, resilience and redemption, and in his works depicting wars and disasters, it expresses the indomitable spirit of human beings in the midst of suffering and the persistent pursuit of salvation. The evolution of the symbolic meanings of these images has enriched the connotation of literary works and reflected people's thinking about religion, human nature and life in different eras.

#### 4.2 Create a Unique Character Image and Spiritual World

Western literary classics have created many characters with the characteristics of Christ, who take self-sacrifice and redemption of others as their mission, show the brilliance of human nature, and reflect the influence of Christian doctrine on literary creation and human pursuit of goodness, justice and redemption. Valjean Valjean, who was imprisoned for 19 years for stealing bread and was full of hatred after being released from prison, was inspired by Bishop Bian Furu to change his mind, practice Christian doctrine, and become a "Christ-like" character who saves others. Duke Mehykin in "The Idiot" is kind, upright, and forgiving, and although he suffers from epilepsy, he saves Nastasya with love and compassion, which illustrates the Christian spirit of fraternity and forgiveness (Kuczok, 2020). Raskolnikov in "Crime and Punishment" was influenced by both the "superman" theory and Christian teachings, and committed a crime in order to prove the "superman" theory, and fell into painful self-blame after committing the crime. It shows the complexity of human nature and the struggle with moral dilemmas. Hester Brand, who is sentenced to wear the scarlet letter "A" for adultery, embodies her relentless quest for redemption in the midst of loneliness and pain by changing people's perceptions and achieving self-redemption through kindness and devotion.

#### 4.3 Construct a Unique Narrative Structure and Thematic Expression

Many Western literary classics use the redemption process of characters as clues to construct narrative structures, and "Pilgrim's Progress" is a typical example. The protagonist, a Christian living in a world full of sin and suffering, is inspired by the Bible to embark on a journey of

redemption. On the way, he encountered the "Desperate Giant" and was imprisoned in the "Castle of Suspicion", but escaped with his strong faith; He also went through the "valley of the shadow of death", and still bravely moved forward in the face of fear and temptation. He also encounters different companions, "faithful" to help, and "Mr. Worldly" to try to mislead him, and these experiences make for a rich and tortuous narrative. This narrative structure allows the reader to clearly feel the growth of the protagonist and the deepening of the theme of redemption, so that the reader understands that redemption requires strong faith and unremitting efforts. The theme of Christian metaphor and redemption raises the theme of literary works from individual fate to thinking about the meaning of human existence, giving the works profound ideological connotation and philosophical value (Gomola, 2010). Taking *Crime and Punishment* as an example, Raskolnikov's journey of crime and redemption reveals the fragility and moral decay of human beings under the pressure of social reality, as well as the consequences of ignoring moral restraint in the pursuit of personal interests. Sonia leads him to redemption with love and tolerance, and makes him realize that the meaning of human existence is to assume responsibility for others and society, and to realize the value of life through love and dedication. "*Crime and Punishment*" integrates Christian metaphors and themes of redemption into it, explores important issues such as morality, ethics, and faith, and provokes readers to think deeply about the meaning of human existence, and has become a literary classic with profound connotation and philosophical value (Marshall, 2001).

## 5. CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIAN METAPHORS AND THEMES OF REDEMPTION

### 5.1 Values and Belief Systems that Reflect Western Culture

In Western literary classics, Christian metaphors and themes of redemption present us with a profound and diverse world of human nature, through which writers have deeply recognized and reflected on the good and evil, weakness and dignity of human nature. In the biblical story, Adam and Eve committed original sin by being tempted by a serpent to steal the forbidden fruit against God's command. The story profoundly reveals the weaknesses that exist in human nature, such as greed, curiosity, and being easily seduced. Adam and Eve's inability to restrain their desires when faced with the temptation of the forbidden fruit eventually led to the fall of humanity. This revelation of human weakness reflects a Christian



recognition of the nature of human beings, which are inherently sinful and need to be overcome through faith and redemption (Foster, 1877). Echoes of this idea can be seen in many Western literary works. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the image of Satan is a concentrated expression of the weaknesses of human nature, such as pride, rebellion, and jealousy. Jealous of God's authority, Satan led the angels in rebellion and was eventually sent to hell. His actions not only led to his own downfall, but also to humanity. Through the creation of the image of Satan, Milton reveals the dark side of human nature and reminds people to be wary of the sin in their hearts. However, Western literary classics also show the good, brave, and resilient side of human nature through Christian metaphors and themes of redemption. In *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean's experience is a prime example. Jean was once a criminal, but under the influence of Bishop Myriel, he gradually realized his mistake and began to try to reform himself. He used his actions to help others, showing kindness and tolerance in human nature. Despite the many difficulties and setbacks he encountered on the road to redemption, he never gave up, exemplifying the tenacity and courage in human nature (Lewis, 2006). This demonstration of the good side of human nature is in line with the Christian teachings on salvation and love, emphasizing that human beings still have the ability to pursue goodness and justice in the face of sin and suffering. In modern literature, due to the turmoil of society and the confusion of people's spiritual world, writers' attitudes towards God and faith are more complex and diverse. In Kafka's work, we can see a despair of God and faith. In "Judgment", the protagonist Joseph K is inexplicably arrested, but he never knows what crime he has committed. He ran around, trying to defend himself, but he could not escape the shadow of the trial. In the process, his faith in God completely collapsed, and he felt abandoned by God and fell into endless despair. Through the experience of Joseph K, Kafka expresses people's doubts and despair about God and faith, as well as their helplessness and fear for the fate of mankind in modern society (Robertson, 2002).

## 5.2 Reveal the Historical Changes and Spiritual Crises of Western Society

Christian metaphor and the theme of redemption are like a mirror in Western literary classics, clearly reflecting the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions in different historical periods, and becoming an important window for us to understand the development process of Western society (Tracy, 1978). In the Middle Ages, Christianity was absolutely dominant, and the Christian metaphors and themes of redemption in literature profoundly reflected the social and political

landscape of the time. The church has supreme power in society, and the pope is not only a religious leader, but also has great influence in politics, economy, etc. In this context, literature often emphasizes the authority of God and the rule of the church, metaphorically referring to God as the supreme ruler and the church as God's representative on earth. People's thoughts and actions are strictly constrained by Christian doctrine, and salvation is seen as a goal that can only be achieved through faith in God and obedience to the church. This metaphor and thematic expression reflects the social and political hierarchy of the Middle Ages and the imprisoning of people's minds by religion (Kuczok, 2020). From an economic point of view, medieval Europe was dominated by an agrarian economy, and the feudal manor system was the main form of economy. The peasants toiled on the estates and lived in hardship, pinning their hopes on God's salvation and freedom from poverty and misery in the afterlife. In literature, this desire for redemption is expressed through various metaphors. If life is compared to a difficult journey, people encounter various difficulties and temptations along the way, and only by relying on God's guidance and salvation can they reach the other side of happiness. This metaphor reflects the helplessness of the medieval peasants in the midst of economic difficulties and their yearning for a better life. In terms of culture, the culture of the Middle Ages was mainly dominated by the church, and education, art, literature, and other fields revolved around Christianity. Christian metaphors and themes of redemption in literature reflect the monotony and religiousness of the culture of the time. The main purpose of church literature is to promote Christian doctrine, to spread Christian values and beliefs through the interpretation of biblical stories and the praise of saints' deeds. During this period, the characters in literary works were often endowed with strong religious overtones, and their actions and fates were closely linked to God's will, becoming examples for people to learn from and follow (Gomola, 2010). With the development of society, people's lifestyles and values have undergone tremendous changes, traditional religious beliefs have been impacted, and people have fallen into spiritual confusion and confusion. In modern society, the progress of science and technology and material abundance do not bring people real happiness and satisfaction, but make people feel empty and lonely in their hearts. In the process of pursuing material interests, people often ignore the needs of the spiritual level, resulting in the barrenness of the spiritual world. In this context, the emergence of Christian metaphors and themes of redemption in literature provides a perspective for reflection and exploration of spiritual crises.

### 5.3 Comparison and Enlightenment from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Comparing Christian metaphors in Western literature with themes of redemption and similar themes in Eastern literature helps us to understand more deeply the uniqueness and commonality of literary creation in different cultural contexts from a cross-cultural perspective. In Eastern literature, the Buddhist idea of liberation is an important theme, which has similarities with the Christian theme of salvation in Western literature, but there are also significant differences (Leeman, 1989). The Buddhist idea of liberation stems from the basic teachings of Buddhism, which holds that life is full of suffering, and that the root of suffering lies in human desire and ignorance. Due to the lack of correct understanding of the nature of the world, people are driven by desire and fall into endless suffering. In order to get rid of this suffering, one needs to attain enlightenment through spiritual practice and thus achieve liberation. This liberation is a state that transcends the cycle of birth and death, which means the freedom and liberation of the mind. In Buddhist scriptures, various metaphors and symbols are often used to express the idea of liberation. Regarded as a symbol of purity and detachment in Buddhism, the lotus flower grows in the mud but blooms into beautiful flowers, implying that people can achieve purity and detachment through their practice in the midst of earthly suffering. The Bodhi tree symbolizes enlightenment and wisdom, and the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and attained supreme wisdom and thus attained liberation. In contrast to the Christian theme of salvation in Western literature, both the Buddhist idea of liberation and the Christian theme of salvation are concerned with the spiritual dilemma of human beings and the quest for transcendence. They all believe that human beings face pain and difficulties in the real world and need to find a way out of these difficulties and achieve spiritual sublimation. In Christianity, human beings are mired in sin and suffering due to original sin, and they need to be saved by believing in God and accepting the redemption of Jesus Christ. In Buddhism, human beings are trapped in the cycle of birth and death due to lust and ignorance, and they need to realize the nature of the world through spiritual practice in order to achieve liberation. This concern for the spiritual predicament of mankind and the pursuit of transcendence reflect the common desire of human beings for spiritual pursuit in different cultural backgrounds (Gomola, 2018). Christian metaphors and themes of redemption have important implications for contemporary literary creation, cultural exchange, and human spiritual pursuit. In contemporary literary creation, the themes of Christian metaphor and redemption provide writers with rich creative materials and

profound ideological connotations. The reflections on human nature, morality, beliefs and other issues contained in these themes can inspire writers to create works with more depth and connotation. In some contemporary novels, writers borrow Christian metaphors to express their criticism of real society and concern for human destiny through symbolism and imagery(Henson, 2020). For example, in some works, the high-rise buildings of the city are metaphorically used as the cage of modern society, in which people lose themselves and yearn to find a way to salvation; The dark night is a metaphor for the confusion and fear of the human heart, and the faint light symbolizes hope and the possibility of redemption. The use of this metaphor not only gives the work a unique artistic charm, but also can provoke readers to think deeply about real problems.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study deeply analyzes the presentation of Christian metaphor and redemption themes in Western literary classics, and reveals their rich connotations, diverse forms of expression, and their profound influence on Western literary creation and culture by analyzing classic works of different periods. In Western literary classics, this theme is expressed in various forms, such as "The Divine Comedy" showing the struggle of the soul between sin and redemption with figurative depictions, "Hamlet" integrating Christian imagery into the fate of characters, "Crime and Punishment" exploring the relationship between sin, redemption and human nature in the context of social reality, and "Metamorphosis" revealing the alienation and confusion of human beings in modern society with absurd techniques (Waltmann, 2012). This theme has had a wide influence on Western literary creation, enriching the literary imagery and symbolic system, shaping a unique character image and spiritual world, constructing a narrative structure with redemption as a clue, deepening the theme, and raising the work to a reflection on the meaning of human existence. From the perspective of cultural interpretation, it reflects Western cultural values and belief systems, reveals human nature, shows people's attitudes towards God and beliefs, and reflects the historical changes and spiritual crises of Western society. From a cross-cultural perspective, compared with similar themes in Oriental literature, it is both unique and common. It is of great significance to contemporary literary creation, cultural exchange and the pursuit of human spirituality, providing materials and connotations for contemporary literature, promoting cultural

exchanges, and reminding people to pay attention to spiritual needs.

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